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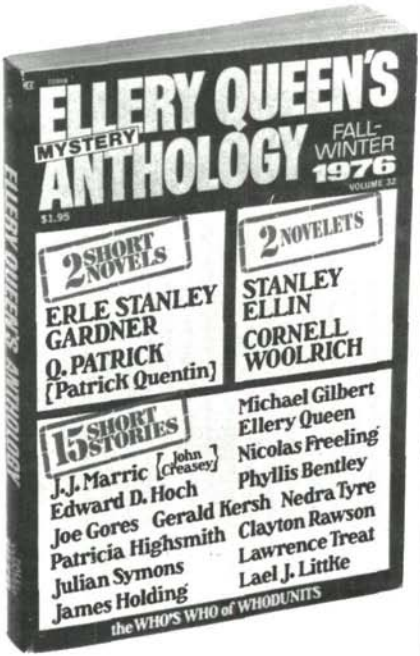


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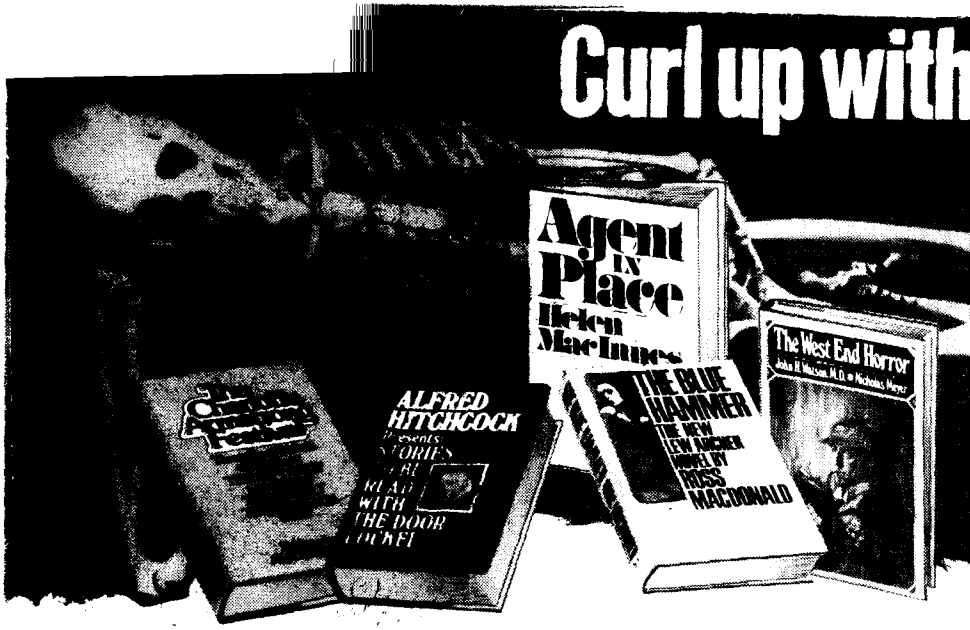


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*A special story to celebrate the 36th anniversary of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . .*

# EQMM NUMBER 400

**by R. L. STEVENS**

It was a blustery evening in late January when Jason Cutworth decided to stop by Alex Mane's apartment on his way home. With the coming of winter their weekly sessions of chess and conversation had grown irregular, and Jason had not spent an evening at the apartment since before Christmas.

Alex Mane greeted him at the door with a handshake of uncertain warmth. "How've you been, Jason? I've been so busy lately I haven't had a chance to phone you."

"That's all right. I was passing by and thought I'd drop in. Hope I'm not interrupting your work."

"Not at all! Come in and sit down." Alex Mane was a free-lance writer and book reviewer who worked at home. Though his writing was mainly popularized scientific nonfiction, he shared Jason's liking for detective stories and had assembled a small library of them.

"I just picked up the four-hundredth issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* at Worldwide News," Jason said, slipping the magazine from his pocket.

Alex Mane grunted. "I got my subscription copy last week. Good lineup of authors. Do you have time for a brandy?"

"I have no plans for the evening," Jason answered. "A brandy would be pleasant." He was still looking at the magazine. "It's something of a coincidence that *EQMM*'s four-hundredth issue is also its thirty-sixth anniversary issue."

"The first one was actually published on September 25, 1941," Alex said, pouring the brandy into two large snifters. "Ellery Queen says so himself in the February 1947 issue. But it's still quite a record. *EQMM* is older than most of the people in the country."

Jason had seated himself in his favorite armchair by the fireplace, brandy glass in hand, when he noticed the lipstick-stained

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cigarette butts in the ashtray. Jason's own marriage had ended in a painful divorce just last year, and now somehow the idea of a woman in Alex's life surprised him. He indicated the ashtray and said, "I hope I haven't interrupted something."

"Not at all, Jason. I just haven't cleaned up from last night." He moved over to the far wall, where a top-heavy bookcase three feet wide held a complete set of *EQMM* along with part of his hardcover mystery collection. Much like Jason himself, Alex Mane had gone through a horror-fantasy period in his late teens, followed almost immediately by a Sherlockian period. After reading it all he'd settled down to mystery and detective fiction. Oddly enough, he'd never tried his hand at writing it, reserving his creative efforts for nonfiction. He was five years younger than Jason, and lacked Jason's mid-forties bulge. He dressed in a sportier fashion and wore his hair longer, but Jason justified his more conservative appearance on the grounds that he taught high school while Alex merely stayed home to write.

"A game of chess?" Jason suggested, breathing deep from the brandy glass. Ruth had always been against his drinking, claiming he couldn't hold his liquor. But after eleven years of marriage she'd been against most of his habits. Perhaps, as he said, she was too young for his middle-aged, middle-class manners.

"I've no mood for chess tonight," Alex Mane said.

"How about shogi?" It was a Japanese version of chess that they played occasionally.

"No, no. No board games. Something intellectual, maybe." Alex glanced at the bookcase. "A quiz, perhaps, based on the four hundred issues of *EQMM*."

"Come on, Alex! You'd beat me badly. I didn't even know the date of the first issue."

"But you have the complete set, as I do." Alex moved closer, swirling the brandy in his glass. "Really, Jason, I'm so glad you stopped by tonight—we have so much to talk about."

"What's that supposed to mean? What's gotten into you, Alex?"

"Come, a quiz! Which issue of *EQMM* contained a magic trick?"

"That one I know." Jason warmed to the game. "It was April 1951, and the first sentence of each story was fixed so that the word 'problems' appeared at an appropriate place. The magician simply asked the victim to open the magazine to the first page of any story, add the digits of the page number, and use the total to count to that word in the story. While the victim concentrated on

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the word, the magician announed it was 'problems.' The trick worked no matter which story the victim chose."

"Excellent! But magicians would call them subjects rather than victims. Now it's your turn—ask me anything!"

Jason thought for a moment, then asked, "How many first stories by new writers has EQMM published?"

"Is it 459 or 460? I'm not sure of the exact number, but I can tell you who some of those budding authors were. Stanley Ellin, Harry Kemelman, Robert L. Fish—"

"And Henry Slesar, Jack Finney, James Yaffee. Lillian de la Torre. It's been the best market for writers who have never been published before."

"And established writers too," Alex said. "Christie, Stout, Gardner, Sayers, Doyle, Simenon, Poe, Carr, Chesterton, Hammett, Chandler, MacDonald, Woolrich—in fact, can you name any important mystery writer who never appeared in *EQMM*?"

"Earl Derr Biggers!"

"Wrong!" Alex pronounced, gloating a bit. "It's true he never wrote a Charlie Chan short story, but he appeared in *EQMM* at least three times with other stories. No, the answer is S. S. Van Dine, though I would have accepted Josephine Tey as correct too. Neither one ever wrote a short mystery."

It was Jason's turn next and he asked, "In what year did *EQMM* begin its practice of publishing one or more pieces of Sherlockiana in the February issue for distribution at the annual Baker Street Irregulars Dinner?"

"That's easy—1947."

Jason was fingering a bronze horse on the coffee table. "If it's so easy I should get another turn. When were the initials *EQMM* first used in reference to the magazine?"

Alex Mane looked blank. "I can't imagine."

Jason felt a surge of triumph. "I've stumped you! The first published use seems to have been in a letter from Anthony Boucher to Vincent Starrett dated December 5, 1942—just over a year after Volume One Number One appeared."

"That's unfair," Alex grumbled. "The answer lies outside the pages of *EQMM*. But I'll have my revenge—why does the 'Q' used as the magazine's tailpiece have two tails instead of one?"

"Because Ellery Queen was really two people," Jason replied.

"Right," Alex said. He began pacing again in front of the bookcase. "I'm tired of this game," he said suddenly.

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"You suggested it."

"Because I thought I could best you. Isn't that the purpose of games?"

Jason merely smiled. "You've never really been able to beat me, Alex. You should know that."

Alex Mane rested his hand on the bookshelves. "Remember when we first met, Jason? You were already a collector. You had a complete set of *EQMM* and have kept it up to date. I was always having to catch up."

"In some things you've surpassed me. This apartment, for instance."

"My writing has been profitable." Alex hesitated and added, "But there were still reasons to envy you. Ruth, for instance."

The mention of his ex-wife startled Jason. Though Alex had met her on various occasions, he'd never mentioned her before. "Ruth is gone," he said quietly. "I don't like to think about her."

"Gone from you, perhaps, but not completely gone by any means." Alex's smile twisted into something just a bit cruel. "She was here last night, Jason. Ruth was here. Those are her cigarette butts."

"Here?" For a moment Jason didn't understand. "Why here?"

"Because she wanted a younger man."

"But—" Jason got to his feet, confused.

"Why do you think she left you, Jason?"

He was not a violent man, but the memory of Ruth, the taunting of this man who had been his friend, was more than Jason could bear. Before he knew what he was doing his hand closed around the heavy bronze horse. He brought it up, and then down.

Alex Mane's face was frozen into an expression of surprise that Jason would always remember.

The detective's name was Maxwell and he was built like a retired fullback. Though there was gray in his hair, he moved about the room with a youthful energy Jason hadn't known in years. "You understand, Mr. Cutworth," he was saying, "we don't doubt your story. It's simply that in a violent death of this sort we have to ask questions."

"I understand perfectly," Jason said.

"Now you told the officer this bookcase fell on him?"

"Correct. At least, I assume that's what happened. Actually I'd stepped into the kitchen for a bit of ice to freshen my drink when

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I heard this terrible crash. You see, he'd been moving his books around to make room for some new things."

Maxwell stared down at the mess on the floor. Though the body beneath them had been removed, the books remained where they'd fallen—400 copies of *EQMM* plus an assortment of mystery novels and anthologies. The detective bent to pick up one of the magazines and asked, "Did he write this stuff?"

"No, no—it was just a recreation, a hobby. He wrote nonfiction on various scientific subjects, and reviewed books."

"He made a living at that?"

"Yes." A better living than I make, Jason added silently.

"This statue—this horse—it was in the bookcase?"

"I believe it was on the top shelf. It must have tumbled out along with everything else."

Maxwell nodded. "Probably hit him on the head. Just one of those freak accidents. Tell me, you two been friends a long time?"

"We've known each other for years, but I've probably seen more of him since my divorce last year."

Maxwell moved the brandy glass slightly and peered into the ashtray. "Was there a woman here tonight?"

"N-no. I guess he just hadn't emptied it."

"Know who he was seeing?"

My ex-wife, Jason answered silently. Aloud he said, "No. You understand we didn't discuss our personal lives, only our interest in detective stories and games."

"What sort of games?"

"Chess, other board games. Sometimes we'd give each other quizzes."

Maxwell grunted. "Just what was he moving when the bookcase fell?"

"He'd recently received the four-hundredth issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and—"

Maxwell looked surprised. "He had all four hundred issues?"

"Yes. I do too. A great many mystery collectors and fans have the full set. There's even an index available for the first three hundred and fifty issues."

"I know," Maxwell said. "I'm a subscriber myself, though I don't have all the back issues. Now just what was he trying to do?"

"Well, he'd run out of shelf space for the *EQMM* issues, so he was going to move them. I suppose when he finished taking out the magazines, the statues and books on the top shelf made the

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bookcase top-heavy and it fell over on him."

"Just where were the *EQMM*s?"

"On those bottom five shelves. The heavier books and statues were on the top two."

Maxwell grunted and kept staring down at the scattered magazines. "Well, we don't need to hold you here any longer, Mr. Cutworth. We'll be in touch if we need anything further."

Jason thanked him and started to leave. He was halfway out the door when he remembered his copy of EQMM Number 400 and went back for it.

He thought very little about Alex Mane in the days that followed. He did not attend the funeral, because he feared that Ruth might be there and under the circumstances he thought it best not to see her.

It was the day after the funeral when he arrived home from school to find the detective, Maxwell, waiting in front of his apartment building. "Good afternoon, Mr. Cutworth. Thought I would see you at the funeral."

"It was too much of a shock. I couldn't bring myself to go."

Maxwell nodded. "I'd like you to come down to headquarters with me, Mr. Cutworth."

"Headquarters?"

"You'll be booked on suspicion of murder. You have a right to remain silent and to consult a lawyer, but I must warn you that any statement you make can be used in evidence against you."

Jason listened to the droning words without really grasping their meaning. This couldn't be happening, not to him. "It was an accident—I didn't kill him!"

"There were four mistakes in your story, Mr. Cutworth. That's too many for any murderer."

"I—"

"I wanted to arrest you that first night, but we didn't have a motive. It didn't turn up till yesterday, when your former wife attended the funeral. I talked to her and found out she'd been seeing Alex Mane. Isn't that why you killed him? Did you think he'd taken her away from you?"

There was a buzzing in Jason's ears. "What four mistakes? What are you talking about?"

"The body was *beneath* the copies of *EQMM*. That meant they were still on the shelves when the bookcase was overturned, not

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out of it as you said. Then too there were the measurements. I went home and measured my set of *EQMM*, allowing for my missing copies. I figured the four hundred issues would take about one hundred and fifty-two inches of shelf space. You said Mane used the bottom five shelves, but those shelves are three feet long. He'd have filled four shelves and maybe eight inches on the fifth shelf. Certainly there'd have been no need to move them yet!"

"You said four mistakes," Jason murmured.

"Your ex-wife told us the bronze horse was on the coffee table, not in the bookcase. And, oh, yes, nobody goes to the kitchen for ice to freshen his drink when he's having a snifter of brandy."

"No," Jason said quietly, "I suppose not."

"Come on, Mr. Cutworth. My car is just across the street."

"Q"

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*It was one of the oldest con games in the Swindlers' Handbook, and poor little Mrs. Kuhlmann, a widow living alone, fell for it hook, line, and sucker. But even the hoariest chestnut of chicanery can still prove that every con scheme, however old, has its new variations . . .*

# ONE OF THE OLDEST CON GAMES

***by ROBERT L. FISH***

"One of the oldest gimmicks in the world," Sam said, not because anyone needed to know but because he was a compulsive talker, "and easy as clubbing carp in a washtub. But they still go for it, you'd be amazed. First thing you do when you hit a new town, you go down to the library and get hold of a copy of a local newspaper, say, three, four months back. Pick out the name of some local character who died, no big-shot, nobody they have a special article about, just a guy from the list of the guys who died that day.

"Pick a foreign name, a Wojenowski, or a Bruno, or a Svenson—Danes are good, or Germans, or Poles, people who save their dough. You pick a guy in his late sixties, early seventies—a guy whose widow would be pretty close to his own age, maybe a little younger, but a guy who, if he has any children, they'd be long married and with their own place. Right?"

"I know," Ralph said resignedly, and sighed.

"Right," Sam said. "Then you get the address where the widow lives. If it isn't in the newspaper squib, and they usually aren't, then you call the undertaker, tell him you just heard about your old pal dying, and want to drop the widow a condolence card."

"You could also look it up in the phone book," Ralph said.

"Oh, you could do that too, but there could be two Michael

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Wojenowskis or whatever listed in the phone book and you have to be sure you've got the right one. Anyway, once you have the right address, then you go and scout the house. Best ones are maybe forty years old, in an older neighborhood, but still clean, one-family house, two-story, probably with the mortgage paid off twenty, thirty years back.

"Then if the house checks out, you check out the widow, make sure she isn't a nut, maybe follow her to the supermarket when she's shopping, see what she picks up for supper.

"Then if it all checks out, you go round the neighborhood until you find the nearest branch bank, probably in the same shopping center as the supermarket. Ten to one that's where the widow banks. Then you call her at home, any nutty excuse to find out if she really does bank there—"

"And if she doesn't bank there?" Ralph asked, not because he hadn't heard Sam give the answer many times before, but just to get a word in edgewise.

"Nine times out of ten these old ladies bank at the nearest place," Sam said confidentially, "but if she doesn't, then forget her and pick out another dead guy, is all. Right?"

"Right," Ralph said wearily.

Old Mrs. Kuhlmann paused in her labors and stared upward toward the basement ceiling. Had her telephone been ringing? She lowered the volume on the small radio that usually accompanied her on her chores around the house and listened carefully. She would have been the first to admit her hearing wasn't what it had been years before, but then what was? When Jake had been alive he often used to kid her about her hearing going downhill, but when Jake was alive they had joked about many things. She used to tell him her hearing was good enough to hear him when he came back from his weekly poker game, tiptoeing up the stairs so he wouldn't have to tell her how much he lost until she'd had breakfast and was in a better mood. But even then it was hard to stay angry with Jake, he was such a good husband—

She suddenly realized she had fallen into her newly acquired habit of daydreaming while the telephone continued to ring. I'm really getting old, she thought, and was reminded of it again when the stairs took their toll as she climbed up them, one wizened hand holding the railing while the other wiped itself nervously against her apron.

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"All right, all right, I'm coming," she told the telephone and raised the receiver, silencing the shrill beast at last. "Hello?" she said.

"Hello, Mrs. Kuhlmann?" It was a strange voice, but pleasant enough.

"Yes, that's me."

"Mrs. Kuhlmann," the man said, "I hope you'll forgive us for bothering you, but this is Mr. Romney at the Crestview National Bank, and I'd like to ask you a question. Did you make a deposit here a short time ago? About thirty minutes ago, to be exact?"

"A deposit?" Mrs. Kuhlmann said, surprised. "Why, no."

"That's strange," the man said, and sounded puzzled. "You do bank here, Mrs. Kuhlmann, don't you?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"Ah, well," the man said. "It's probably just a bookkeeping error. Well, thank you, Mrs. Kuhlmann. Sorry to have bothered you." The receiver was softly replaced at the other end of the line.

Old Mrs. Kuhlmann hung up and stared at the telephone, perplexed. A deposit to her account? Who on earth could have done that? It was undoubtedly a mistake. Like the man said, a bookkeeping error. Jake would have been able to make something of it, possibly, if he had answered the phone. In the old days Jake always answered the phone when it rang—when he was home, that is, which had been more and more after he quit the printing shop and started to work at home, but there was no sense thinking about Jake because there wasn't any Jake any more, and there was never, never going to be any Jake any more on this earth, and sitting here feeling sorry for herself wasn't going to solve anything, or feed anybody, either.

She sighed and came to her feet, automatically wiping the little table where the telephone sat, using a corner of her apron, and then jumped a little as the telephone rang, more sharply this time it seemed to her. She picked it up, frowning. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Kuhlmann?"

"Yes, this is me." My Lord! Two telephone calls in one day! And she had been about to have the thing taken out, because she never used it. She became aware that the man was speaking and concentrated on listening.

"Mrs. Kuhlmann, this is Lieutenant Garrett of the police department. Precinct number—" The deep voice was suddenly lowered while still remaining quite audible, even to old Mrs.

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Kuhlmann's failing ears. "What is it, Mike? Can't you handle it? Then tell the Captain. What? Oh, all right. I suppose so." The voice returned to Mrs. Kuhlmann. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Kuhlmann, but something just came up. It'll only take a moment. Don't hang up."

The authority in those final words made the thought of hanging up impossible. There was the sharp sound of the receiver being placed down on something hard, like a bare desk top, and then the background noises Mrs. Kuhlmann had been vaguely aware of while the lieutenant had been speaking became noticeably louder. There was the sound of several automobile horns blaring, and one of the constantly intermingling voices said, "Hey, somebody shut that window, will you?" There was a slam and the street noises abated. "That's better," said the voice, while another one was saying, "Sergeant, can I see you over here a minute?" and a third voice overrode them both, saying, "Now, there's nothing to worry about, Miss. I'm sure we'll locate your father in a matter of days."

Through it all the urgent and frequent ringing of a telephone punctuated the ebb and flow of muffled conversation while the incessant rattle of a typewriter furnished an almost hypnotic backdrop to the entire acoustic tapestry.

Old Mrs. Kuhlmann fell back into daydreaming. She had met Jake when he had come to work at the printing shop where she was a typist. Fifty-three years ago, that had been. Fifty-three years—how the time flew! She'd been a good typist too, but Jake made her quit when they got married, saying that no wife of his would ever work in an office or a factory, and she never had.

She had helped Jake at home when he started out on his own, of course, but that was only natural and not at all the same thing as working on the outside. And it had been fun working with Jake. He'd been a good man, and a good provider while he was alive, and while he hadn't left her a whole lot of cash, he'd left her everything else, including some fine memories. She really couldn't complain—

"Mrs. Kuhlmann?" The deep voice brought Mrs. Kuhlmann from her thoughts. "Sorry about the interruption, but that's how it goes in a busy police precinct. Now, where were we? Oh, yes. You see, Mrs. Kuhlmann, one of the officers of the Crestview National Bank is under suspicion of embezzling, and we wonder if we could use your help in our investigation."

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"Me? My help?" Mrs. Kuhlmann stared at the telephone. "So that's what the man from the bank was calling about, was it?"

"That's right. You're pretty sharp, Mrs. Kuhlmann." There was admiration in the lieutenant's tone.

"Thank you." Well, she told herself defensively, I'm not in my dotage yet! "Of course I'd like to help, but I don't quite see what I can do."

"Don't worry about that, Mrs. Kuhlmann," the lieutenant said. "We wouldn't have called you if we weren't sure you were the right person for us." His voice became more official. "What we'd like you to do is to withdraw some funds from your account, temporarily. A day at the most. We guarantee you'll lose no interest, and we'll see that detectives are assigned to make sure you won't be robbed for the short time the money will be out of the bank. You won't even see these men, so don't be disturbed by the thought of your neighbors seeing policemen around you. And you'll be doing your duty as a citizen, Mrs. Kuhlmann, and that's something you can always be proud of."

"Oh!" Well, old Mrs. Kuhlmann didn't know many things, but she knew what Jake would have said in the circumstances. Jake was very proud of being a citizen, because he came over as a youngster, apprenticed to— There she went again, daydreaming! "Of course," she said. "Tell me what to do."

"Thank you," the lieutenant said. "It's really quite simple. All you have to do is withdraw money from the bank, temporarily. After that we'll have further instructions for you, but both you and your money will be protected at all times, and it will only be for a day at the most. And by the way," he added, "under no circumstances are you to mention at the bank the reason for the withdrawal." His voice dropped conspiratorially. "I'm sure a smart woman like you can understand the reason for that. Until we have the necessary evidence in hand to convict, any leak in our plans could ruin our case."

"Oh, I can understand that," old Mrs. Kuhlmann said, and knew that Jake would have been proud of her. He always said she had to be sharper than she acted. Of course, he used to kid her, too, when she did something silly, like the time she forgot the potatoes when they had the Millikens over for supper—she brought her mind back to the business at hand. "How much do you think I should withdraw, Lieutenant? Would—uh—forty-five dollars be enough?"

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The lieutenant chuckled and then instantly wiped the chuckle away as not being proper to a case of such serious dimensions. "I'm afraid we could scarcely convict a man for embezzlement on the basis of a mere forty-five dollars, Mrs. Kuhlmann. We're not after him for pilfering, or petty larceny. We want him for the big one." His tone chided old Mrs. Kuhlmann for having failed him in his newly acquired expectations of her. "How much do you have in the bank?"

Mrs. Kuhlmann wet her lips and looked about the room.

"Come, come, Mrs. Kuhlmann," the lieutenant said in a kindly tone. "We are the police. We're here to protect you, don't forget that. How much do you have in the bank?"

"Um—ah—six thousand dollars," Mrs. Kuhlmann said at last.

"Well, take out forty-nine hundred and leave the rest," the lieutenant said. It was almost an order. "I'm sure that will be enough to tempt the scoundrel." He added soothingly, "It's really quite all right, Mrs. Kuhlmann. You'll be under constant surveillance until the money is returned to the bank. And I wouldn't be surprised," he added, "if the bank didn't offer a reward when the matter is cleared up. So don't worry."

"I wasn't worried about *that*," old Mrs. Kuhlmann said a bit untruthfully, and then asked a question that had occurred to her. "Do you think they would be suspicious if I took the money out in"—the old lady's voice dropped as she mentioned the sacred figures—"in hundred-dollar bills?"

"The bank? Not at all." The lieutenant's tone moved on to more important things. "And I'd get over to the bank as soon as possible, Mrs. Kuhlmann. They close in less than an hour, you know."

"Oh, yes, oh, yes!" old Mrs. Kuhlmann said hastily, and hung up instantly, hurrying to put on her hat and coat.

Sam swung around from the telephone in the cheap hotel room and then reached over to switch off the small cassette tape recorder that had provided such an authentic audio portrayal of a busy police station. It had taken a lot of over-taping and dubbed sound effects to produce that particular tape, as Sam had told Ralph often enough, and Sam was rightly proud of it. He winked at Ralph and came to his feet.

"Easy?"

"They often are," Ralph said dryly, and bit back a yawn.

"And you get the drift of only asking for forty-nine hundred?"

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"You always only ask for forty-nine hundred no matter how much they've got," Ralph said wearily.

"Right. Because banks get real fussy whenever anyone withdraws more than five thousand at a time in cash," Sam said, as if Ralph had not spoken. "Don't ask me why, but you come in with a check for over five thousand and you have to get about sixteen bank officials to countersign it. But under five thousand and there's no question, if they know you. Don't ask me why."

"I won't," Ralph promised.

"And now we go over to the bank and make sure the little old lady really goes there," Sam said, "because when we make the pickup we don't want to find out she was stringing us along all the time and just waited for me to hang up to call the cops. We don't want that, do we?"

"No," Ralph said in a tired voice. "We don't want that."

They drove the few blocks to the bank, parked in a space that provided proper surveillance, and watched as a few minutes later little old Mrs. Kuhlmann came bustling down the street in her dowdy hat and coat, her purse under her arm, and hurried into the bank. Five minutes later and the old lady was out again, her purse now clutched desperately between the skinny but strong fingers of both hands. The corner of a stiff brown envelope peeked out of the stuffed purse. Sam grinned and put the car in gear.

"Now," he said, "when we get back to the hotel, we synchronize our watches, because exactly one hour from now I make the call, and exactly one minute after I start dialing I want you knocking on her door. It's the old one-two punch that gets them! We wait that one hour because the longer she has that much cold cash in that big house all alone, the quicker she's going to be relieved to hand it over to Detective Brownell, which is you. Right? And less than an hour and she might not be nervous enough, and any more than an hour and she might get so nervous she'd be calling the station house for protection." He winked at Ralph. "It's all in the timing. Psychology. Right?"

"Sam," Ralph said in desperation, "you talk too much, you know that? You go on and on like a damn phonograph! I've done this caper with you a dozen times or more, so will you please quit going through that damn monologue of yours, for God's sake?"

"Right!" Sam said happily, not having heard a single word, and turned the car toward the hotel.

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This time when the telephone rang, old Mrs. Kuhlmann had been awaiting the noisy summons. She hurried from the basement, one hand clutching an envelope, and raised the receiver quickly. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Kuhlmann." She was relieved to hear the voice of Lieutenant Whatever-his-name-was. "Do you have the money?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Good! And has Detective Brownell shown up?"

"Who? Nobody's been here—" She paused. Somebody was knocking on the front door and she suddenly remembered that the doorbell was out of order. Jake would have fixed it long ago, he was so clever with his hands, but she wasn't handy with tools, and she'd meant to ask the man at the hardware store, but she'd forgotten. And actually, not many people ever came to the door, except the mailman, and all he brought were the utility bills—

She suddenly became aware that the rapping had increased in volume and tempo. There she went again! Daydreaming when things had to be done! "Just a second," she said to the telephone a bit breathlessly. "Somebody's at the door. Maybe it's him."

She put the instrument down and hurried to the door, opening it to face a tall thin man with a bored look on his face and a set of handcuffs dangling from his belt. She smiled at him a bit timidly. "Is your name Brownell?" He nodded. "Lieutenant What's-his-name," old Mrs. Kuhlmann said. "I think he wants to talk to you."

"Right. I mean, thank you," said Detective Brownell. He marched to the instrument and picked it up. "Brownell," he said succinctly, and listened. There was a faint buzz from the phone as Brownell received his instructions. He nodded from time to time as old Mrs. Kuhlmann waited. "Right," he said into the telephone, listened some more, and then could not help but add, trying desperately not to sound savage, "I know, I know!"

He hung up and turned to face the little old lady, straightening his face.

"Mrs. Kuhlmann," he said in as detective-like a manner as he could, "it will be necessary for me to take the money down to headquarters and have it marked, after which it will be returned to the bank. Then when the embezzler tries to get his hands on it"—he suddenly clenched one fist, wishing it was Sam's tongue between his fingers—"we'll have him!" He regained his official mien. "May I have the money, please?"

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Mrs. Kuhlmann handed over the envelope she had been clutching so tightly. Detective Brownell riffled the bills, counting them quickly. "On the button," he muttered to himself, and stuffed the envelope in his pocket. He looked up sternly. "And we must repeat—please tell no one at the bank about this. Or anybody else, for that matter. It could seriously hamper our investigation."

"Well, of course I won't tell anyone!" old Mrs. Kuhlmann said indignantly. My Lord, everyone thought she was stupid!

It was the following evening, and Sam and Ralph were hundreds of miles from Crestview and little old Mrs. Kuhlmann, and the only time Sam had stopped talking in all that time, Ralph thought, verging on despondency, was when he dropped by the local library for a few minutes in the afternoon. Now, with an excellent meal at one of the plushier clubs in the city inside him, and the bill paid, Sam sipped at his brandy, tucked his dollar cigar into one corner of his mouth, and fished a small bit of newsprint from his vest pocket. He referred to it, a satisfied smile on his face.

"Tenza, Emil. Age seventy-two years. Passed away April seventh, four months ago. Beloved husband of Helen, devoted father of Isabel Probst of Chicago and Evelyn Kellerman of Detroit, not to mention devoted grandfather of Thomas, Joseph, and Sally Probst, as well as Billy Kellerman, Junior." He looked up, his eyes twinkling. "And I'm sure both dutiful daughters showed up at the funeral and then went home, leaving poor old Mama all alone in the big empty house."

He tucked the clipping back into his pocket, rolled the cigar in his mouth, and leaned back, puffing luxuriously. "Like I keep trying to tell you, Ralph, one of the oldest gimmicks in the world and easy as clubbing carp in a washtub. But they still go for it, you'd be amazed."

Ralph stared hopelessly at the ceiling. The thought of hearing that tireless voice go on and on, repeating the endless litany for the thousandth time, was enough to ruin even the fine meal they had just finished. Eight courses, which weren't too many for a peaceful dinner, since when Sam was chewing at least he wasn't talking. Heaven help me! Ralph thought piously, but was suddenly saved by a more earthly entity. Before Sam could continue, there was a touch on his arm and he looked up to find a huge man in a tuxedo standing beside him.

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"Yes?" Sam said politely, thinking it might be his change.

"This hundred dollar bill," the big man said, and pushed it under Sam's nose. "With *Lincoln* on the face of it?" His tone indicated total incredulity. "Passing slush in *my* club? You guys must be suicidal."

Ralph stared at Sam in startled shock. *That little old lady?* For once Sam was silent, stunned into speechlessness, but for once Ralph was not relieved.

"Let's go into the office," the huge man said grimly, "and see if you guys can smoke my buck cigars when you each got two broken elbows!"

And old Mrs. Kuhlmann, as she put the newspaper-wrapped package back into the bank's safety-deposit box, smiled a little nervously when she thought what Jake's reaction would have been to her using the one-hundred-dollar plates. He had just been experimenting when he made them, perfecting his art, and he only put Lincoln's picture on them to please her, because she insisted he engraved Abraham Lincoln much better than he did Benjamin Franklin. Well, the truth of the matter was—whether Jake admitted it or not—he did do Lincoln much better than he did Franklin. In fact, the only plates he ever let her print were the ones that had Lincoln's picture on them; and heaven only knows what she would have done if she didn't have those, because when Jake died all he left her were the plates, a safety-deposit box paid up for years to keep them in, and $45 in their joint account.

"I know you told me never to print those big plates," she told the ceiling of the small room off the main vault, her quavering voice apologetic, "but I couldn't admit to that nice Lieutenant What's-his-name that you didn't even leave me six thousand dollars, could I? It would have made you look bad, Jake, and you weren't bad at all," she said. "Only sometimes not too bright . . ."

"Q"

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**a *NEW* Inspector Petrella story by**

**MICHAEL GILBERT**

*Number Three in the new series about Detective Chief Inspector Patrick Petrella . . . about a report written by Petrella, an official and confidential report, that got into the wrong hands and how Petrella faced his toughest and most dangerous case—in court. . .*

*The last story in this new series is about three teenagers and "The Happy Brotherhood"—it will appear soon. . .*

# ROUGH JUSTICE

***by MICHAEL GILBERT***

It was a fine morning in early October when Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella became Detective Chief Inspector Petrella. The promotion had been expected for some time, but it was nevertheless agreeable when a copy of District Orders and a friendly note of congratulation from Chief Superintendent Watterson arrived together on Petrella's desk at Patton Street Police Station.

He had been six months in Q Division and had been carrying out a mental stocktaking. A few successes, a lot of routine work done without discredit, one or two undoubted flops. One of the worst had been his failure to secure the conviction of Arthur Bond. If ever anyone should have been found guilty and jailed—

"A Mr. Bond asking for you," said Constable Lampier, projecting his untidy head of hair round the door. Lampier was the newest, youngest, least efficient, and most cheerful of the constables at Patton Street. Repeated orders from Sergeant Gwilliam to smarten himself up generally and for God's sake get his hair cut had had only a superficial effect. Like brushing a puppy which immediately goes out and chases a cat through a thorn bush.

"Mr. *Who*?"

"Bond. He's the geezer who keeps that garage. The one we didn't make it stick with that time—"

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"All right, all right," said Petrella. "Don't let's conduct a post-mortem. Just show him in."

Mr. Bond was not one of his favorite people. He had a big white face, a lower lip which turned down like the spout of a jug, and a voice which grated more when he tried to be friendly than when he was in his normal mood of oily arrogance. On this occasion he was making no attempt to be agreeable.

He said, "You've got no right to say the things you've been saying about me. I'm telling you, I'm not standing for it."

"If you'd explain what you're talking about."

"I'll explain, all right."

He opened his briefcase and threw a document onto the table. It was a photocopy, and to Petrella's astonishment it was a copy of a report he had himself written the day before.

He said, "Where on earth did you get that?"

"Never mind where I got it. You got no right to say those things."

"I do mind where you got it. And I insist on an explanation."

"If you want an explanation, ask the editor of the *Courier*."

"I certainly will ask him," said Petrella grimly, "and I hope he's got an explanation, because if he hasn't, he's going to be in trouble."

"The person who's going to be in trouble," said Mr. Bond, his lower lip quivering with some indefinable emotion, "is you. This is libelous. I've got my rights. I'm going to take this to court. You can't go around ruining people's characters. You know that."

"If you produce this document in court you realize you'll have to explain exactly how you got hold of it."

"No difficulty. The editor gave it to me."

"Then he'll have to explain."

"You don't seem to realize," snarled Mr. Bond, "it isn't him or me who's in trouble. It's you."

When he had gone Petrella telephoned Sergeant Gwilliam. He said, "Yesterday I sent a batch of confidentials by hand to Central. Find out who took them, and send him up."

Five minutes later the untidy topknot of Constable Lampier made a second appearance round his door.

"So it was you, was it?" said Petrella.

"That's right, sir."

"Then perhaps you'll explain how one of the documents got into the hands of the editor of the local paper."

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"Lost the wallet, sir."

"You *lost* it?"

"Had it taken."

"Explain."

"Went up by tube. Victoria Line from Stockwell. The train was very crowded."

Petrella considered the matter. So far there was an element of plausibility in it. Junior constables on routine errands usually traveled by public transport and, as he knew himself, the Victoria Line could be crowded.

He said, "What actually happened?"

"I don't really know," said Lampier unhappily. "The car was full. I was standing near the door. I put the wallet down on the floor, by my foot. When I got to Victoria it was gone. I made a fuss, but it wasn't any use. Someone must have slid out with it the station before."

"Why didn't you report it?"

"I did, sir. That afternoon when I got back. To Sergeant Cove."

Petrella was on the point of telephoning for Sergeant Cove when he spotted the report. It was at the bottom of his In tray. He had been so pleased with reading about his own promotion that he hadn't got down to it.

The editor of the Stockwell and Clapham *Courier* was an elderly man with a face like a bloodhound's. Petrella knew him of old as a nurser of grudges and no friend of authority. The editor said, "The papers were dropped in here by hand this morning. We get a crowd of people in and out of the front office. No one noticed this one in particular. If they're yours you'd better have them."

He pushed across a bundle of papers. Petrella picked them up and looked through them. As far as he could see they were all there. He said, "Was there a covering letter?"

"There was."

"May I see it?"

The editor hesitated. Then he said, "I don't see why not."

The letter was typewritten. It said: "Dear Editor, I picked these up in a pub in Victoria Street this afternoon. I think they might interest you, particularly the stuff about Mr. Bond."

The note was unsigned.

"These are official documents," said Petrella. "You should have sent them straight back."

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"How was I to know? They're not marked 'Top Secret.' "

"They're on official paper."

"Doesn't mean a thing. Anyone can get hold of notepaper."

"If you didn't know, why didn't you ring up and find out?"

"Why should I go out of my way to help the police? What have they ever done to help me?"

It was an outlook Petrella had heard expressed before, though never quite so baldly.

"All right," he said. "I agree there was no actual obligation on your part to do anything. So why did you have one particular document copied and sent to Mr. Bond?"

"Mr. Bond happens to be a friend of mine," said the editor. "I thought he ought to know about it."

"And that's the whole story?" said Commander Abel.

"That's it, sir."

"Tell me about the previous case involving Bond."

"We'd heard a lot of talk about that particular garage. People put their cars in to have a tire changed and when they came to pick up the cars found the engine taken down and half a dozen other things apparently needing to be put right. And straight overcharging for any job that was done. It's difficult to prove.

"Then we thought we had got something that would stand up. This man, Mr. Ferris, put his car in for an M.O.T. test. When he went to fetch it he got a bill for nearly one hundred pounds. The point was, he'd just had the car overhauled by a garage in Southend, where he'd been staying. A complete five-thousand-mile test. He lodged an official complaint. We had to take it up."

"But you couldn't make it stick."

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Bond had it all lined up. One of his mechanics gave evidence. A real old villain. Blinded the bench with science. Our Mr. Fairbrother's a good magistrate, but he's not a motorist. Invoices for spare parts, all in order. Work sheets showing time spent on the overhaul. If a car came in for a test it had to be made roadworthy, didn't it? He'd told the gentleman that. The gentleman had agreed. The job had been done. Here was the evidence all in order."

"Then what went wrong?"

"The whole thing went wrong," said Petrella slowly. "The mechanic was in it, of course. He made up his own time sheets.

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The spare parts were bought for cash, from car breakers throughout the Borough—the sort of people who keep no records. The invoices themselves were dirty little scraps of paper. And I fancy most of them had been altered."

While Commander Abel was considering the matter the third man present spoke. Mr. Samson was the senior legal adviser to the Metropolitan Police. He said, "I'm afraid there's no doubt about it. If Bond starts an action for libel, you've got something to answer."

"But surely," said Abel, "a report like this is privileged."

"Qualified privilege."

"What does that mean?"

"It can be set aside by proof of malice."

"And just how would they prove that?"

"They'd say that this officer was so annoyed about Bond getting off last time that he made entirely unjustified allegations against him in a report. If the report had never gone outside Scotland Yard, it wouldn't have mattered. But it did. It was published to third parties."

"That's something that wants looking into too," said Abel grimly.

"You're sure you did have that bag stolen?" said Petrella.

"Dead-sure, sir," said Lampier. "It happened just like I told you."

"You didn't leave it in a pub in Victoria Street?"

"Certainly not, sir."

Petrella examined the untidy young man critically. It was a long time since he had walked a beat himself. He tried to think himself back to those days. Lampier would have got to Victoria Station at about one o'clock. He probably hadn't had any lunch before he started. Would he have stopped at a pub for a drink and a sandwich? It was perfectly possible. Was Lampier a liar? That was possible too. Was it any use pressing him further? Petrella thought not. There came a moment when policemen had to believe one another.

Petrella said, "That's all right, Lampier. I just wanted to be clear about it."

Lampier, as he was going, stopped for a moment by the door and said, "Is anyone going to make trouble, sir, about that paper?"

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"If they do, we'll get over it," said Petrella.

He managed to say it confidently, but it was a confidence he was far from feeling.

The next three months were not pleasant. Routine work continued. No one said anything. Even the Stockwell and Clapham *Courier* was muted. There was a brief paragraph to the effect that a local businessman, a Mr. Bond, had issued a writ claiming damages against a police officer.

Petrella had two more conferences with the legal Mr. Samson and could feel lapping around him, like the serpents about Laocoon, the strangling coils of the law. He knew enough about the processes of the civil courts to realize that no public servant came entirely clean out of that particular mud bath.

It was toward the end of the third conference that something really alarming occurred. He began to detect, in the measured utterances of the lawyer, a suggestion that the matter might be settled out of court—a payment to solace Mr. Bond's wounded feelings and an apology in open court.

"My client wishes it to be understood that there is no truth whatever in the statements made about the plaintiff. The plaintiff is a man of excellent character." Like hell he was! Bond was a crook. A successful crook, but a crook nonetheless. The thought of crawling to him made Petrella wince.

"We're in a cleft stick," said Mr. Samson. "If we plead fair comment, we've got to show that what you said was fair. And that really means proving the charges against Bond, which was something you couldn't do in court, and certainly couldn't do now. We can run the defense of qualified privilege, but that lets them bring in all the arguments that you were prejudiced against Bond, that you didn't like him, and were angry that he'd got off."

"Which is true," said Petrella. "But it wasn't my reason for writing the report."

"If you're as candid as that when you give evidence," said Mr. Samson drily, "the case is lost before we begin."

It was a few days after this unhappy interview that Constable Lampier brought Nurse Fearing to see Petrella. She was a middle-aged woman with an air of professional competence about her that was explained when he recognized her as the most senior and respected of the local District Nurses. She said, "I rely on my

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little car, Inspector. If it goes wrong it has to be put right. I've been driving for forty years. I know a lot about cars, and I know that this garage swindled me. The man must be brought to book."

Petrella listened, fascinated. A lifetime of dealing with nervous young mothers and panic-stricken young fathers had endowed her with a calm authority which brooked no argument. He said, "It isn't going to be at all easy, Mrs. Fearing. I hardly think you realize just how awkward it is."

"I've heard about the other case," said Nurse Fearing. "And all the lies this man, Bond, told. How anyone could get up in court and say things like that passes my comprehension, but then, I'm old-fashioned."

"All the same—" said Petrella. And this was all he did manage to say. For the next ten minutes it was Nurse Fearing who did the talking.

"I can't stop you," said Chief Superintendent Watterson. He sounded worried. "A member of the public has made a complaint. We're bound to follow it up. There's *prima facie* evidence. But I need hardly tell you—"

"That's all right," said Petrella. "I understand the position. If we lose this one we're sunk. Another unsuccessful prosecution. Further proof that I'm prejudiced. Right?"

"If you don't get home this time," said Watterson, "we shall have to settle the libel case on their terms. And that won't do your prospects any good at all."

"You're understating the case," said Petrella. "I won't have any prospects left."

"Are you going to handle it yourself?"

"I may be foolish, but I'm not that foolish. I'm getting Mr. Tasker to handle it."

Mr. Tasker was a local solicitor who did a lot of police-court work, appearing both for and against the police.

"Tasker's good," said Watterson. "But he can't fight unless you give him some ammunition."

"We shall do our best," said Petrella.

He sounded, thought Watterson, unaccountably cheerful for a man who has placed his own head on the block.

Counsel for the defense said, "I only propose to call one more witness, sir. You have heard Mr. Bond and seen the documents he

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produced. In the ordinary way I should have submitted that this evidence was conclusive. The solicitor appearing for the police challenged it—"

Mr. Tasker smiled blandly.

"—but was quite unable to shake it. Mr. Bond told us that he himself had purchased the new distributor—"

"Not new, reconditioned," said Mr. Tasker without troubling to get up.

"I beg your pardon," said Counsel with elaborate politeness, but a slight flush of annoyance. "I should have said the reconditioned distributor and the new set of points. He also supervised the work, which was actually carried out by his mechanic, whom I am now calling. If he corroborates the evidence already given, I think you will agree that this effectively disposes of the charges which the police"—here Counsel swiveled round and stared at Petrella who was seated beside Mr. Tasker—"the police have seen fit to bring for the second time in three months against my client. I hesitate to use the word persecution, but in the circumstances—"

"I think we'd better hear your witness first," said the magistrate mildly.

"If you please. Call Mr. Ardingly. Now, Mr. Ardingly, I will ask you if you recall effecting certain repairs to an Austin 1100 motorcar on December 28 of last year—"

Mr. Ardingly, who looked about 17, had blue eyes, curly hair, and a shy smile, said he certainly remembered fixing a distributor to the car in question. Yes, he had done the work himself. Yes, he had filled in the time sheets which were shown to him. Yes, that was his signature at the bottom. After about five minutes Counsel sat down with a satisfied smile.

Mr. Tasker rose slowly to his feet. He said, "Mr. Ardingly, this time sheet shows a record of six hours of work on this motorcar on December 28 and an additional three hours on December 29. Did you actually do that amount of work?"

"Nine hours to put on a new distributor," said Mr. Ardingly in tones of surprise. "Not likely."

"Then if it didn't take you nine hours," said Mr. Tasker with a look at Mr. Bond, whose white face had turned even whiter, "why did you put down that number of hours on the sheet?"

"I put down what the guv'nor told me to put down."

"It's a lie," screamed Mr. Bond, leaping up.

"I must ask you to warn your client to behave himself," said the

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magistrate. "If he does not do so, I will have him taken out of the court and held in custody."

Mr. Bond subsided slowly.

"Now, Mr. Ardingly," said Mr. Tasker. "About the distributor. The reconditioned distributor, which Mr. Bond has told us he purchased from Acme Spares—"

"That's quite right. I went and fetched it for him myself. I slipped them a quid."

"One pound!" said Mr. Tasker in beautifully simulated surprise, peering at the paper he held in his hand. "But this invoice for the distributor is for twelve pounds and fifty pence."

"You know how it is," said Mr. Ardingly with an engaging smile. "They always add on a bit."

"Very satisfactory," said Superintendent Watterson grimly. "Guilty as charged. Papers sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Charges of perjury pending against Bond. He can hardly continue his libel action against you. Would you mind explaining how you fixed it?"

"Fixed it?" said Petrella.

"You're not in court now. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. How much did you pay Ardingly?"

Petrella looked genuinely shocked. "I should never have dreamed of doing such a thing. Besides, it was quite unnecessary. The boy loathed Bond. He's a nasty old man, and had already made a pass at him."

"And how did you find that out?"

"He's Constable Lampier's cousin."

"I see," said Watterson. As, indeed, he was beginning to do. "No relation of Nurse Fearing, I suppose."

"He was one of her babies."

"Quite a coincidence."

"Not really. She's delivered half of the Borough in her time."

"I suppose there's a moral to it."

"The moral," said Petrella smugly, "is always trust your own staff."

**The April 1977 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale March 1.**

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**a *NEW* short story by**
**J. N. WILLIAMSON**

*A story with an important theme, especially relevant to our times, especially pertinent to men and women in their fifties and up . . . How one man, Estel Conley, handled the problem of mandatory retirement at the age of sixty-two when he was "disgustingly healthy, had 20-20 vision with glasses, could hear a gnat breathing," when his brain was still functioning on all cylinders . . .*

# STATEMENT OF THE ACCUSED

**by J. N. WILLIAMSON**

"My name is Estel Conley. I'm sixty-two years old, and I died about three months ago. It's not that I actually passed on, but where old Estel is concerned, forced retirement turned out to be the same as dying.

"I have to give you a little background on my life and my job before you'll really understand just why I committed all these crimes. Once I was married to a wonderful jet-haired girl named Florence. I called her Flo, sometimes Flea just to tease her, and when I was starting my career, Flo was the best wife a man could ask for.

"Really, she was the best wife possible even after I became National Sales Manager. That was about twenty years ago, when I was in my early forties and both Flo and I believed that financial security was all that we needed to be really happy.

"That was also the time when they started flying me around the country, calling on branch managers and seeing that sales were up to projections. I tell you, there was nothing like it in the whole world! First place, I hadn't even been in a plane before and it was always a big kick for me to get aboard one. Like I was on this vital secret mission that nobody on the plane knew about but me. For a man who grew up in poverty, it was pretty sweet hav-

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ing nice stewardesses at my beck and call. Of course, my company—International Products, Inc.—paid all the expenses.

"Somehow that just made it even more special, not worrying about anything but justifying the old expense account. Then there was being boss of all those young struggling fellows who were trying to sell our products—helping 'em, prodding 'em along, teaching 'em the ropes. Why, I had ten answers for every objection that a customer could mention! Everybody knew that my personality and voice worked so well that—

"Well, why go into that? It's ancient history. I think the trouble between the Flea and me started on one of those business trips. I knew I had to fire a bright kid in his middle twenties, name of Burt Neal, because he just couldn't make himself stop talking long enough to hear the customer say yes. At first I dreaded the job of discharging Burt. Scared me in a way that hits the stomach, if you know what I mean.

"But that's when it began. Call it Crime Number One. Enjoyment in exercising power by firing somebody. Now, this crime probably doesn't mean much to you, but it set the stage for all the other ones that *do* matter with you. I mean, my head got so big I decided nothing but a Vice Presidency of old IPI would satisfy me.

"And that's when Flo and me started falling apart. All told, it took about four years before she had enough—enough of being by herself until midnight every night and sometimes for days, even weeks, at a time, enough of trying to raise three kids, being both Mom and Dad. Lots of fellows in my position would tell you they work these long hours because their bosses make 'em. Baloney. They do it because they've been bitten by the promotion bug. And because power, however limited, is heady stuff.

"So all at once, when I'm nearly forty-seven years old and have over twenty years and three children invested in my home and family, Flo announces it's all over and—would you believe it?—I was so preoccupied at the time by a demand made on me by my boss, Mr. Willis, that I didn't even argue to save our marriage. I just sort of nodded and told her I'd take care of her, Billy, Mary, and Tony without any needling on her part.

"Crime Number Two. Putting my own ambition ahead of my wife and kids. Well, that one doesn't interest you much either, does it?

"But it interests me. I'd never be here now if I hadn't committed that particular crime. Anyway, the Flea got her divorce and I

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let her have a fine settlement. Which was the time that I decided I absolutely *had* to become Vice President in order to live in the manner I wanted to.

"Hell, I didn't even know what that meant! If I'd been honest with myself, I'd have known I didn't have the stuff to be a swinger. All the old drives were pretty quiet now, except the ambition to succeed at IPI in a big way; but I still told myself I had to have a fancy bachelor apartment to take girls to. In case I ever got up the nerve to mention it to a girl.

"So the next twelve or fourteen years went by in a strange kind of way. I was floating on the surface of time, paying no attention to the years passing or anything but becoming a Vice President. Business sort of sucked me in, headfirst. There'd be one year when sales were down a lot, and I'd be flying here and there, doing what I could to bring 'em up. And I was good at it too. Then there'd be what Mr. Willis called 'a banner Grade A year,' with profits up, and I'd be busy working on expansion, taking on and training new salespersons. That's what I had to start calling 'em: "salespersons." Because we had to start taking on a woman now and then.

"Mr. Willis made plenty of bad decisions and threw his weight around a lot. But I knew he depended on me and I was proud enough of that to look away when he pushed other people around. At nights and on weekends, whenever I was in town, I spent hours on reports. Truth of the matter was, I never really wondered whether I was enjoying life or not. That's part of the trap, y'know—being on a treadmill just permits you time to do your company thing, not your own thing. You don't think about yesterday, or tomorrow.

"All I kept at the back of my mind was that siren of a Vice Presidency. All my efforts gradually got shoved in that direction till I measured my own performance—something a salesperson does a lot—in terms of how good it looked to Mr. Willis.

"I'd see the kids at times. I can remember once, looking at Billy and realizing he was grown up, and I couldn't figure how that had happened. For maybe five minutes I noticed time and its needs. Flo didn't bother me with the kids' illnesses, except sometimes to ask for a little extra money to pay doctors' bills. Funny thing was, every time I saw the Flea she somehow looked the same to me. When I allowed a second or two, her agelessness amazed me, left me breathless.

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"And there was always this feeling I had for her, somewhere on the edges of my mind, lurking in the shadows. Maybe it was love.

"But that didn't matter because, when I was fifty-nine, and the kids were all grown up, the Flea died. There was this very peculiar, awful minute at work when Mary, my daughter, called to tell me. 'Mom's dead, Daddy,' she said. Like that, starting to cry. And I remember looking at the papers on my desk, and my attaché case all packed and ready for a trip to Cleveland, and I wondered if the funeral would interfere with my business trip.

"After that I cried some. I think it was guilt that I didn't think about Flo first off. That's really a pretty big crime, but don't bother to number it. You'll find bigger ones coming up.

"Mr. Willis called me in a few months after poor Flo was put to rest, and he sat there smoothing his mustache with one manicured finger. Then he told me that Bob Criss was getting the new Vice Presidency. 'I had more than one option, Estel,' he said to me without a tone of regret or even apology. 'You were certainly an option.'

" 'I was an option,' I repeated, thinking of Criss, a pompous jackass in his thirties who had been with IPI less than three years.

" 'But you're almost sixty now, Estel. I have to think about the future of IPI. Naturally, you'll continue in your current capacity as National Sales Manager until your retirement.'

" 'Retirement,' I said. 'I don't want to retire, Mr. Willis.'

" 'Sixty-two is it, Estel,' he said. 'Mandatory retirement. So just give Criss the benefit of your vast experience, play it cool and easy for a couple of years, and you're home free.'

"And that's how it turned out. Right after my sixty-second birthday, just a few months ago, IPI got together and gave me a party. We ate at a nice place and had some drinks. Most of us had some laughs. Old Denny, our copywriter, wrote a little parody of how I'd find stuff to sell even after I was retired—crutches, false teeth, and all. Everybody laughed, including me.

"Then I was home alone and I cried for the second time in my life. Can I explain the rest of it? You see, the calendar showed that I was sixty-two but I'm disgustingly healthy. I have this paunch that I used to try to reduce, but it got to be sort of a trademark around old IPI and it never slows me down except when my legs get a little achey. My eyes are still 20-20 with glasses and I can hear a gnat breathing, and a year ago I managed to catch the first girl in my whole career at IPI.

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"She's half my age, is Katie Bragdon, and a lot of other men want her. Even Mr. Willis, and Katie told me she just couldn't stand the idea of being kissed by him and his awful mustache. But she let *me* kiss her. And she said that I was quite a man.

"Maybe. And a retired man. And something more.

"I was a man who was twice divorced. First by Flo.

"Now IPI had done it to me too. And after thinking it over, I decided I had made a bad mistake losing Flo. Now I had to make an effort to get my second marriage back. So I went to see Mr. Willis and told him I wanted to do something on a part-time basis. 'I don't much care what,' I told him, shrugging. 'Something to keep my hand in. And you don't have to pay me much.'

"Mr. Willis said politely that he would think about it. Which is when I told him he didn't have to pay me a cent, really.

" 'That's not the point, Estel,' he said, frowning. 'The money isn't the thing. It's company principle. You earned your retirement, and we're giving it to you.'

"I told him I didn't want it, I wanted to give it back. He told me that I had to keep it and suggested I learn to relax. 'Call up your kids and see about visiting them,' he went on.

" 'They don't talk to me any more.' I paused. 'Not since I went to Cleveland instead of their mother's funeral.'

" 'It'll all work out, Estel,' he assured me, putting a cigar in my hand. All those years and he didn't know that I don't smoke. 'You'll see. In no time at all you'll be busy with something really satisfying.'

"So I went home to sit and to think. And the more I thought, the madder I got. Maybe Flo had reason to divorce me, but not IPI. I gave it everything I had. Tears came to my eyes when I realized that what was happening was odd—I was caught up in a love-hate relationship. I was spurned by my lover, so I hated her. And I had to show her.

"And that brings us to today, and I thank you for your patience. I got up this morning and shaved for the first time in a week. I got out my good business suit and put it on. I used a lot of expensive cologne, and slicked my gray hair over to cover the bald spot. I got in my car and drove to work.

" 'Well, Estel,' began Lucy, the receptionist. 'What brings you here?'

" 'Got to talk to Mr. Willis,' I answered, and started walking back to his office.

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" 'You can't see him right now, Estel,' Lucy called. 'You know how he is about appointments.'

"I paid no attention. At the heavy door behind which I had spent so many hours in strategy and conferences, I set my shoulders. Then I tapped once and walked in.

" 'Estel!' said Mr. Willis, his dark eyebrows raising. 'What brings you here?'

" 'Business. *My* business.' I walked over to the handsome desk and leaned on it, looking down at my old boss. '*Our* business.'

" 'Do we have to go through that again?' he demanded. 'It's not your business, it's mine.'

" 'A business has a lot of moods, a lot of parts and stages. A big chunk of it was mine.' That's when I pulled out the revolver. It was a good one and shiny new. 'Mr. Willis, I want you to call everybody in here. The whole staff.'

" 'W-what the hell are you doing, man?' he asked, paling under his California-vacation tan. 'Why the gun?'

" 'Call the staff together,' I said quietly.

"He did, his mustache twitching. One after another he buzzed desks and told them all to come in. Something warmed inside of me.

"As they entered, I left the gun dangling at my side so that nobody but Mr. Willis knew it was there. About twenty-five people filed into the office, most of them saying a warm hello or slapping my shoulder. And my warm spot expanded—it was great to be back.

"Mr. Willis regained some of his dignity. 'Estel here has asked me to bring you all together.'

" 'Told,' I said. 'I didn't ask.'

" 'Very well. He told me to. He has a gun, you see, and I had no choice. I guess it's Estel's move.' He stopped and stared grimly at me.

"I grinned. 'Hi, everybody.' A few answered, friendly enough, most of them looking puzzled. Katie Bragdon peered at me from beneath inquiring, lowered brows and I think I saw the trace of a smile on her pretty mouth. 'We're running the company right today,' I told them all. 'Mr. Willis is giving me the Vice Presidency of Marketing and you'—I pointed to Bob Criss—'you are out.'

"I turned to the controller, Rich Winters. 'Rich, write him out a two-week severance check when you get back to your office.'

" 'You can't do this,' Criss protested, taking a step toward me.

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"I held the gun level with his chest. 'Stop me,' I suggested. And he backed up.

" 'Another thing, Rich,' I said to the controller. 'Call our broker and buy four thousand shares of STU. I recommended it before, but Mr. Willis wouldn't listen to me. Also, sell five thousand shares of IPI here to Cummins, Incorporated. It cuts Mr. Willis' holdings to where somebody can reason with him for a change.'

" 'Rich, don't do it,' Mr. Willis cried in alarm.

" 'He'll do it,' I said. 'Everybody will do just what I say today, because after you all leave the office, I'm staying right here with Mr. Willis. If you call the police, then I'll have to make Mr. Willis as dead an issue as I am.' Then I went around to most of them. 'Do you understand, Sam? Is it clear, Liz?' I talked to them one at a time and they all nodded. Denny whispered, 'Nice going.'

When I was done, I took a deep breath and glanced at my fellow employees. All of them—except Criss—were smiling. Maybe not big smiles, maybe not without a little concern or confusion, but smiling. 'Let's get to work,' I said.

"My next task was to outline the rest of the day's activities. I went from department to department, giving orders, the ones Willis should have been giving. Here and there I made a promotion on the spot, rewarding those who were past due.

"When they were all dismissed and back at their jobs, I sat down, nestled the gun into my paunch but aimed at Mr. Willis, and got on the phone. While I was waiting for the call to come through, Mr. Willis said, 'What you're doing can be classified as kidnaping, Conley.'

"I nodded. 'Yep. I kidnaped every man and woman here, plus your business.'

"When I got the different salespersons on the phone, I told them they were getting a raise in commission from three to five percent. Then I told them to take the rest of the day off.

"That took a few hours. I watched Mr. Willis carefully, saw him squirm, but he didn't say anything much. He just smoked his expensive cigars and glowered at me.

"During the day problems came up, of course. The people approached me tentatively and I encouraged 'em, helped 'em along. 'You watching, Mr. Willis?' I asked airily, enjoying myself. 'Do you understand yet how important it is to listen to people's problems—*really* listen?'

"He didn't have anything to say.

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"I asked Katie to bring in lunch for herself, Mr. Willis, and me. We had a great old time, Katie and me, talking about the way things were going to improve at IPI. When lunch was over, she gave me a big kiss and told me to be careful. I winked.

"There were letters to dictate, letters to customers who learned that there was somebody in charge who knew how to stand firm and sell at a fair price for a reasonable profit—not lie or gouge. Mr. Willis' typist was really good, getting 'em all typed nice and fast for his signature.

" 'Sign them,' I said, pointing with the barrel of the gun.

" 'I won't.' He clamped his lips together and the mustache drooped over them. 'I didn't write those letters. *You* sign them.'

" 'I want everything official, Mr. Willis, and you're still the President—at least, until the next stockholders' meeting.' The tip of the gun sat coldly on the end of his nose. 'Sign.'

"He signed. For the first time I saw how sweaty he was. 'Estel, you can't hold us here forever,' he said. 'Do you plan to hold me in my office overnight, or go home with me, or what?'

" 'Why, I plan for you to go to your mistress tonight and get your nerves fixed. And I'm going to jail.' I sucked a tooth thoughtfully. 'I don't suppose you'll understand it until, someday, you're paid off and just told to beat it. But I've had a marvelous time today.'

"He seemed puzzled. Then he looked at his watch. 'It's almost quitting time. Do you mean this is all there is to it?'

" 'Soon as the mail is posted.'

" 'You don't want money, or a plane to escape with?'

" 'Nope.'

" 'You aren't g-going to kill me?'

" 'Of course not.'

" 'Then what in the name of all that's sane is this all about?' he demanded. 'Estel, you come in here, hold up my whole business operation for a day, fix it so that the control of stock shifts, sell a lot of products that can't make me a cent, and make a lot of personnel changes that I'll switch back tomorrow morning. What do *you* get out of this?'

" 'A day of having what was mine,' I told him. 'Bought and paid for with a wife and family. A day of seeing the business run the way it should be. Besides, everybody out there *liked* the way IPI was run. You're going to find it hard to change all the positions back the way they were, without giving raises to hard-working

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folks who have earned them. The stock will stay sold, and what you bought will make you a profit. Why, you'll probably come out ahead, Mr. Willis, after you go home and think it through. You may even decide that what I've done is right.'

"For a long time, it seemed, Mr. Willis gaped at me. His cigar went out. Then he shrugged, and smiled. 'Estel, can I have the gun out of my face now?'

"'You can just plain have the gun,' I told him, and tossed it into his lap. 'It wasn't loaded anyway.'

"So that's the story, Sergeant. Hell, I may have been wrong as could be and if you or Mr. Willis want to press charges, you have every right to. But take a look at this card that I had Katie Bragdon run off for me during the day. You see what it says? ESTEL CONLEY, VICE PRESIDENT. I'll always have this little stack of cards to remind me. And Katie says she'll come visit. Now, well, I guess I'm home free at last."

## CRIMINALIMERICK

*CHINATOWN*

*by D. R. BENSEN*

Years ago a tong leader, Ah Fong,
Fought a war with the gang of Kim Wong.
Young Katz, a smart cop,
Pulled a raid, made them stop;
Now Fong's silent, for Katz got his tong.

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**a *NEW* private-eye story by**
**ERNEST SAVAGE**

*From the standpoints of balance, reading pace, and diversity EQMM does not publish as many private-eye stories as it should. There are various reasons: first, private-eye stories tend to repeat themselves by following a formula — according to Hoyle more than according to Doyle; second, the style is so fixed that private-eye stories often seem to be parodies of themselves; third, relatively few hardboiled stories come our way — we veer away from violence, shun sensationalism-for-the-sake-of-sensationalism.*

*Here is a different example of the semihardboiled — about, one might say, three-minute yeggs. Meet Sam Train, former lieutenant on the force, now a cop on his own; and meet Doc Wharton's daughter, "a chip off the old block". — and we promise you won't forget Mitzi Wharton easily . . . a tale of larceny and love, both grand . . .*

# DOC WHARTON'S LEGACY

**by *ERNEST SAVAGE***

I read the *Chronicle* story that evening at dinner; and when I got home and read the letter from Doc Wharton, I read the *Chronicle* story again.

The newspaper story said that Belcher and Crumb had been shot and killed by two Mountain County deputies named Arkins and Jellicoe. Belcher and Crumb were the two prison escapees and bank robbers every cop north of Bakersfield had been looking for lately. Arkins and Jellicoe, according to the story, had been patrolling one of the Mountain County roads near the Nevada border when they saw the body of a man on a dirt trail winding uphill from the road. He was dead. He'd bled to death from a gunshot wound in the belly. His name was Edward Wharton and he

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lived in a cabin farther up the trail and he hadn't been dead long.

Investigating, the two deputies came upon Belcher and Crumb near Wharton's cabin, and in the ensuing gunfight had shot them dead. In the two-column cut of Arkins and Jellicoe, they looked like the winner and runner-up in an idiot contest, but maybe they were thinking about the $8,000 reward that went with the two dead crooks.

I'd known Doc Wharton for 15 years. I'd arrested him in the early '60s for practicing medicine without a license and failing to report a gunshot wound he'd treated. A couple years before that he'd lost his license for performing illegal abortions. The medical board agreed he was a good doctor—when he wasn't drunk—but that wasn't often enough to warrant his continued practice.

Personally, I liked the man. He seemed to have an affinity for the underworld, but I liked him anyway. He had style. I got a Christmas card from him every year, but the letter I got that night was the first. And the last. It was typed and full of errors and smears, which I won't attempt to reproduce. It follows in full:

Dear Sam:

A little while ago I killed two men who in turn killed me. I've got maybe 20 minutes to get this thing written and mailed.

I saw them come up from the road and when one of them split and circled to the rear of the cabin, I knew they were trouble. I got my gun, eased the front door open, and stood back in the shadows. The one out front was coming on at a crouch, a .45 automatic in his right hand. He was ready for war, Sam. When he was ten feet from the porch I hit him in the middle of the forehead and he went over like an acrobat. He died instantly.

The other one came running around from the rear just as I stepped out on the porch. We both fired at the same time. His shot entered my upper abdomen between—I would guess—the transverse colon and stomach. Tore up the pancreas and duodenum beyond a doubt, but didn't put me down. My shot put him on his back. It ruptured his sternum, probably ripped through the right auricle of his heart and lodged against a thoracic vertabrae.

He was about two minutes dying. I was able to get to him but there was nothing I could do. He was a good-looking kid and had a pleasant soft smile on his face. He told me to look in his jacket pocket before he died, and I did. The enclosed is what I found.

Sam, I want you to see that Mitzi gets the reward. I don't need

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to tell you how little I've been able to do for her, even from the first. I haven't heard from her for a long time, but wherever she is I know she can use the money. There is nothing else.

Now I'm going to try to put this thing in an envelope and get it down to the box before the juices run out.

*Adutrumque paratus,*
Edward Wharton, M.D. (erst.)

The enclosure was a Wanted poster, probably ripped from a post-office bulletin board. Guys on the lam have an affinity for their own publicity. It showed the usual pictures of Belcher and Crumb, recited their crimes, and offered $8,000 for them, dead or alive. Lower middle-class on the crook scale.

I got up from my desk, poured myself a brandy, and looked in my dictionary. *Adutrumque paratus* was Latin for "ready for either alternative." I laughed. As I said, Doc Wharton had style. And a way of screwing things up to the bitter end.

Mitzi Wharton had been dancing topless when I first knew her, and I mean to advise, she was built for the work. In the '60s she got herself picked up two or three times a year, but as far as I know she was never convicted of anything but damn foolishness. She was about five-ten tall, but always carried herself straight with her chest out. Most tall girls tend to slump, but not Mitzi.

Doc Wharton once told me she'd got into a fist fight with a boy her first day in kindergarten, and she'd had her dukes up ever since. She had a face that shifted around between pugnacity and pulchritude. She wasn't pretty in any ordinary way, but she was good-looking and had a lot of the Wharton style.

I hadn't seen her for months now and had no idea where she was living, but I didn't even bother to look her up in the book. I called this desk sergeant I know and asked him to locate her for me and he said he would.

Then I wondered if I should put in a call for the Mountain County Sheriff and tell him he had a couple of cuties on his staff; but I figured he probably knew that already, and was maybe even party to his deputies' little deception.

Mitzi was in the slammer. When my friend, Mike Phelps, called back at 10:30 he said she'd been picked up around seven that evening for disturbing the peace and hitting a cop in the face with her handbag. "Which wouldn't have been so bad," Mike said, "except it had a sixteen-ounce jar of strawberry jam in it."

"Why'd she do that?"

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"She said he called her a hooker."

"Is she?"

"Well, her means of support lacks a little something in the way of visibility, but she claims she isn't."

"How's the guy she hit?"

"He'll be eating soft food for a few days, they tell me, but outside of that he's okay."

I sighed. "Now what'll happen?"

"I don't know, Sam. She's at Central Station, not here, but it has the makings of a stand-off. Maybe if you call Lieutenant West over there you can get him to drop it. He's got a lot bigger fish to fry than her."

I thanked Phelps, then punched out the Central Station number and finally got West. He and I came up together in the Force and had good rapport. I'd quit after the strike, but he'd hung in there. He had two kids in college and couldn't afford to quit. Now he was having a bad night. The street rats were running and he had two knifings and a half-dozen other happenings on his hands. When I told him I'd pick up Mitzi at 8:00 A.M., he told me I could have her now if I wanted. But I didn't want.

The next morning, over breakfast, I let Mitzi read her father's letter and the Wanted poster. She had an interesting face to watch. It had matured some since I'd seen it last, but it had the old mobility I remembered, eyes, brows, and mouth moving with the sense of what she read. She smiled wryly at the end. She knew the Latin, which surprised me.

"Heaven or hell," she said. "He didn't care which, did he? He thought it was all here anyway. If he hadn't been my father, Sam, I would have liked him, I guess. A girl is supposed to have a thing for her father, isn't she? Maybe we did, in reverse."

It pleased me she hadn't mentioned the money first, but she got to it soon enough. "So now I'm an heiress, huh? Eight grand."

"There's a problem," I told her, and showed her the story in yesterday's *Chronicle*. Her face displayed hostility, her eyes fire as she read it. "The damn nerve of them!" she exploded. "Typical cops!"

"Don't generalize, Mitzi."

"You read it your way, Lieutenant, I'll read it mine."

"Drop the title, Mitzi. It's Sam Train now. I'm private."

"Couldn't live with it any longer, huh?"

"Never mind why. Do you want to go up there and get this

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thing straightened out, or not?"

"Why do I need you?" Her big green eyes flashed animosity at me as the symbol of everything she was accustomed to hold in contempt. It was an automatic reaction. She'd belted a street cop in the face last night with 16 ounces of strawberry jam and evidently taken a lick or two herself in return. There was a mark under her right cheekbone that wasn't a makeup smear and wouldn't wash off with soap and water. And it wasn't the only knock she'd taken from a cop in her thirty-two or thirty-three years.

"Think of me," I said, "as administrator of your old man's estate. This letter gives me both the authority and the responsibility."

"At how big a cut, *Mister* Train?"

"Just pay for the gas."

"I can get a car somewhere. I don't need yours."

"But you need my letter, Mitzi."

"You guys've always got the last word, haven't you." She added something in a deep throaty voice and slumped tiredly in her chair. The desk cop at Central had told me she hadn't slept much last night in the tank, but then nobody does except the drunks. In the moment's repose her face was lovely and I wondered, as I had wondered before, why some big rangy guy hadn't taken her in hand long ago. I'd even wondered once or twice why I hadn't myself.

She straightened abruptly in her chair, shucking off the fatigue, shoulders back, eyes engaging mine. "Sam, is it real, the eight grand?"

"It's real, but we've got to go there and reclaim it."

"Fight 'em for it, huh?"

"If it comes to that, Mitzi."

"It'll come to that—it always does. Damn it, what a world," she added, then raised her coffee cup and said, her eyes flashing again, "Well, *adutrumque paratus,* shamus." She pronounced it suavely.

"We'll win," I said. "Just leave the strawberry jam at home."

"Not a chance! It's my shillelagh."

I took her to her apartment just off Van Ness and she said she was going to take her sweet time getting the stink of jail off her skin and I'd better come up. If I were still on the Force I wouldn't

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have, but I was my own man now.

It was a dump on the outside, but had an almost nun-like neatness inside, as though in defiance of the other circumstances of her life—anyone's life in this town and time. A cell of quiet in the midst of the storm.

A sleeping alcove behind drapes was off the main room and the drapes didn't quite meet at the center after she'd drawn them.I could see a slice of her bed and bits and pieces of her flitting around as she got undressed. She didn't seem to care if I looked and nothing in me told me not to. I'd seen everything there is to see in this town that shows everything there is to show, but that flitting, segmented display of a spectacular woman was as fresh and touching as a child's smile. It moved me deeply in a strange new way.

I shook my head. I'd made a quantum leap in a direction I not only didn't like, but that frightened me. I'm a cop, an ex-cop, but I'm still cop. I deal in the brute, bloody rubble of civilization. I'm not a lady's man.

"Hey, Sam," she hollered before she took her bath. "Make some coffee if you want. I got one of those Mr. Coffee things over there in the kitchen."

I did. It was a relief. To like her was one thing; to want her something else again. Mr. Coffee talked me out of it. But not for long.

We left town on the Bay Bridge and took 80 to Sacramento where we branched south. She was wearing an expensive denim pants-suit that looked great on her. She'd got it as part of a modeling fee, she told me.

"That cop last night said you were a hooker," I said flatly, the thing coming alive again.

"And suffered pains for his error, Mr. Train."

"You're not a hooker?"

"We're all hookers, as the man said. But if you mean what I think you mean, I'm not and never have been."

"Okay," I blurted, "that's okay." It shouldn't have been important to me one way or the other, but it was and I couldn't suppress it.

I'd seen Mitzi maybe twenty times in the last ten-twelve years, sometimes on the street just in passing, or in a store, but mostly in the line of work. She'd got picked up more times than a three-

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dollar bill, usually for resisting arrest, or interfering with somebody else's arrest. She wasn't a hippie or militant or revolutionary, but she had a sense of right and wrong that was up front and quick to express itself.

Once that I know of, the charge had been drunk and disorderly, but she wasn't a boozer in the usual sense of the word. She wasn't anything that I could pin down. Model? Dancer? Stripper? Salesclerk? "No visible means of support," the charge sheet had said last night; but that's what they put down when they arrest a mobster.

She had her head back and eyes closed, her long auburn hair draping over the seat of the car. She spoke only when spoken to and I let her rest through most of the first 100 miles while I fought back this rising surge in me. After the orderliness and discipline of nineteen years on the Force I was coming apart at the seams.

At 2000-feet elevation she seemed to respond to the sharply increased freshness of air and sat up straight, her eyes open. The long flat Central Valley had been steeped in its usual haze, cutting visibility to a few miles and turning the mind in on itself.

We crossed State 49 a little west of Fiddletown in the old Mother Lode country and then picked up State 6 for the uphill run to Mountain City. I'd never been this way before and neither had she. She was studying the mountain scene with an alien's critical eye.

"What brought him up here?" she asked finally. "He was a city man all his life. He needed to live in a place where there's a bar on every corner."

"Maybe he grew out of that, Mitzi. Maybe in the end he needed space and clarity and silence."

"That's a good definition of death, isn't it?" She shuddered. "Or maybe it's what life is supposed to be like, but we just forgot, all of us. Maybe Pop was right."

She was hugging herself, arms Xed across her chest. She was beginning to mourn him and I felt pleased with her again.

A long time later she laughed briefly and said, "You know the thing about him that was so different? He had manners, he was the last of the courteous men. Even when drunk. I can remember him coming home in the middle of the night, bombed to the brows. I would get up to make sure he didn't kill himself on the stairs and he would say, 'Forgive me for disturbing your rest, my

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dear.' He must have said that to me a thousand times. 'Forgive me for disturbing your rest, my dear.' "

"And did you?"

"No. Not then. I'm just beginning to now, but then I made him pay. The young are the sternest judges, aren't they, Sam? They're the ones who make the bombs. They don't forgive you, they blow your head off. Poor Pop, poor old Pop! I really made him pay. That's when I began taking my clothes off in public."

"He resented that?"

"He thought it was bad manners." She looked gloomily out the window for a moment. "And he was right."

We got to Mountain City at 2:30. Mountain City was about ten minutes long and four minutes wide, tucked between two craggy peaks that still had snow on their crowns. One thousand, one hundred forty-four people, elevation 6,480 feet. Wine-sharp air. Main Street was lined with red-brick structures that had been new in 1910. One of them had a name that caught my eye as we drifted past—the Jellicoe Building; it was the name of one of the deputies in the *Chronicle* story, the tall one.

The Sheriff's headquarters was on the far edge of town. It was a small, new, handsome structure made of native stone and set in a grove of dowager Douglas firs, the asphalted parking lot spreading between them like a flow of black lava. It was pretty and peaceful-looking.

Mitzi made no move to get out when I'd parked. She was slumped against the door, crying softly now. "I wonder where his body is" she said huskily. "He told me once he wanted to be cremated and his ashes scattered out past the Golden Gate. Maybe he thought it was symbolic of something. I want to do that for him, Sam."

"We'll find out where he is," I said. "Come on in."

"No, I'll wait," she mumbled. "I just want to sit here for a while. You got a tissue?"

"In the glove compartment," I said, and wanted urgently to draw her into my arms. It was probably not the first time she'd cried in her 33 years, but it was the first time I'd seen her cry and it did something to me. "Take your time," I said feebly.

Inside the building, the woman behind the counter was flanked by communication equipment, all of it silent for the moment. She was reading the latest edition of the *Guinness Book of Records* and put it down, smiling. A pile of yesterday's edition of

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the *Chronicle* was stacked on the counter between us. I told her my name and that I wanted to see the Sheriff about the reward money, and I let her think I had it in my pants.

Within 30 seconds I was in the Sheriff's private office being invited to sit down. I didn't. I waited for the woman to close the door behind me and then handed the Sheriff Doc Wharton's letter and told him my story. There was a stack of *Chronicle*s on his desk too. They would be an embarrassment to him soon.

Sheriff Mason had one of those faces that seem to be seven-eighths below the cheekbones, like Nixon's, with long curving jowels hammocked from the ears. He read old Doc's letter slowly, then caught his face between his hands and pushed it around like a half-inflated volleyball.

"I knew it!" he muttered. "I knew them two jackasses was conning me. I knew damn well it couldn't be the way they said it was because the hole in that what's-his-name's head was a .45 hole if ever I seen one. Grace!" He hollered into his intercom, and I had a vision of Grace easing herself down off the ceiling. "Get Arkins from acrost the street and tell him to get his butt in here right now and get Jellicoe on the radio and tell him to get his butt in here too—on the double!"

I sat down and watched Mason calm himself enough to read the letter again, his lips moving around like the open end of a hose. "So Doc had a daughter," he said.

"Did you know Wharton?"

"Hell, everybody knew him. He comes down—usta come down—durin' the ski season and help Doc Zerbo set bones. Wouldn't take no fee for it 'cause he said he wasn't licensed, but Zerbo kept him in booze and food. He's a real nice man. Was. Dammit, can't get usta him bein' gone. What about the daughter?"

"You might say she's a chip off the old block."

"That'd make her a mighty nice girl, Mr. Train."

"She's got it in her," I said. "What about the cabin, Sheriff? Who owned it?"

"Hell, that place reverted to the State years ago. Nobody owned it. Doc just squatted there, and welcome—"

"Where's his body?"

"At Madison Funeral Parlor down the street. We use it for a morgue. I suppose she'll want him."

"She will."

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Arkins came in after a brief knock on the door, and Mason made him sit down at the desk and read the letter while he and I watched his dark skinny face turn darker. He read it twice, then turned it over and looked at the back, and then stared at the ceiling, sighing.

"We kinda wondered," he said finally, "what old Doc was doin' down by the mailbox, but the flag wasn't up so we—"

Mason smacked the desk. "I s'pose if the flag *was* up you woulda took the letter outa the box, huh, Arkins?"

"Hell, no, Harry! Fella don't fool with the mail, that's Federal. We—"

"So what you done was local, is that it? Just a little County offense, is that it?"

"Hell, Harry, we had no idea Doc Wharton had kin, did you?"

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, it makes *all* the damn difference, don't it?"

I was pleased with the way it was going. I'd expected a fight, but not one I could just sit and watch like a tennis match. The Sheriff was boiling but his hand, pawing at the pile of *Chronicle*s as he talked, revealed the basic source of his concern. He could forgive Arkins and Jellicoe their little deception, I thought, but the problem now was what to do about it, how to deal with the publicity that had ensued.

"So now," Mason snarled, "I got a coupla heroes that oughta be slung in jail. I know why you did this, by God, Arkins, you been sneakin' over the border into Nevada again and losing at craps, ain't you?"

"Harry—"

"How much, dammit?"

"About twenty-seven hundred, but—"

"Good Godamighty! How much into Jellicoe?"

"Nothin', Sheriff. Johnny don't play no more."

The Sheriff kneaded his jaws again and asked Grace through the intercom where Jellicoe was, for damn Pete's sake.

"He drove in the parking lot about five minutes ago," I heard her say, "but he hasn't come in the building yet."

"Probably hit one of the trees out there," Mason muttered, "and is makin' out a phony accident report. Mr. Train, I got to apologize for all this, sir. I ain't *never* been so embarrassed by my men, and I tell you I've been embarrassed by 'em more times than one."

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"Nothin' wrong with Johnny," Arkins protested. "Johnny's a good man, Harry, and you know it. Nothin' much wrong with me neither that a forty-foot fence along the state line wouldn't cure. I admit, I got this bug."

Mason stared at his deputy in astonished incredulity. "So there's nothin' wrong with Jellicoe, huh? Mr. Train," he said, turning to me, "what would you call a deputy who carries skis in his patrol car from November to May and fishin' gear and a pick and shovel and a gold-pannin' pan all the rest of the year?"

I was growing wary. "An outdoor man, to say the least."

"Outdoor man! Hell, he oughta be livin' in a tree."

"He don't do none of them things on duty, though, Harry," Arkins said. "His ma give him too much what-for after that last time."

"I saw the name Jellicoe on a building in town," I said to the Sheriff. "Is that him?"

"His family. His grandpa built it. His ma still owns it."

"How old is he?"

"He's a thirty-five-year-old adolescent—goin' on thirty-four."

"I don't care," Arkins said. "Ain't nobody I'd rather have with me in a tight place than Johnny."

"Well, there's that," Mason conceded. "But otherwise, he don't hardly know the time of day, and if he don't get his butt in here—"

"I'll go get him," Arkins said, and picked up his hat from the desk and left the room in a hurry.

I smelled a scam. The Sheriff's anguish was a bit too theatrical to suit the facts, a bit too diversionary. And he and Arkins had fed each other lines like a veteran comedy team. Arkins I'd judged to be about forty and a long-time deputy—on an easy first-name basis with the boss.

In one corner of the room by an outside door there was a fly-rod and creel and a pair of hip boots, so Mason himself was no stranger to the amenities of the region that he and his minions served. It was then I noticed that Arkins had picked up Doc's letter along with his hat, but I didn't let Mason see the sudden awareness in my eyes.

"Sheriff," I said quietly, "I was a cop in San Francisco for nineteen years and one of the things I learned early was to make copies of any important papers in a case. To save yourself further embarassment, you'd better make sure Arkins brings that letter

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back with him when he comes."

Mason debated for a long moment, then decided to call the bluff. "What letter, Mr. Train?"

"The letter he would have swiped from Doc Wharton's mailbox if he'd known it was there. Don't dig the hole any deeper, Mason—it's just about the depth of a grave right now."

"No, sir, Mr. Train, you're bluffin'. But don't get your hackles up. I needed an edge on you and now I got it. I don't want no bad publicity out of this thing—that's all. I knew what the boys was up to and let 'em get away with it because I honestly didn't think Doc Wharton had a soul in the world to leave nothin' to and I'd enjoy seein' the boys get a dollar or two. We get paid up here about as much as a ragpicker down below, and—"

"All right, Sheriff, what's your deal?"

"Let's split it."

"No way."

"Arkins needs $2700 for them skunks in Nevada. The rest to the girl."

"No way. Arkins should have known better."

"Everybody should know better than to gamble with them sharks over there, but nobody does. What's your deal, Mr. Train?"

"All of it to the girl. Your men can receive it publicly, then they turn it over to the girl, every cent."

Arkins tapped lightly on the door just then and came in, followed by a tall, good-looking blond man, Jellicoe. Adolescent wasn't the word, I thought at first glance; naive maybe, a mountain man's face.

Mason spoke to Arkins. "Did you show him the letter?"

"What letter?" Arkins said blandly.

"*The* letter, dammit! How many letters we talkin' about this afternoon?"

"I showed him." Arkins' eyes seemed to wince.

Mason said to Jellicoe, "Where in hell you been, Johnny?"

"There's this girl in the parking lot, Sheriff, crying." He looked deeply concerned. "I sat down with her in her car. She's still crying."

"No damn wonder she's still crying. Jellicoe, this here's Mr. Sam Train. He brought out the letter."

I stood up and traded a firm handshake with him. He was an inch taller than I and I found myself stretching to my fullest height. It had been a long time since I'd looked into eyes as clear

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and guileless as his, seen a smile as quick and warm. It made me uneasy. "You musta been a good friend of Doc's," he said.

"I was, Jellicoe. Were you?"

"Yes, sir! I loved that man. Everybody up here did."

"Was he dead when you found him?" I asked it almost belligerently. "Or just dying? The story in the paper said he was dead but who knows about papers."

"He was dead, Mr. Train." A frown was developing around his eyes.

"How do you know?"

"Well, I didn't know for absolutely sure, sir, until Doc Zerbo came out and said so. But—"

"You radioed for Zerbo?"

"Yes, sir."

"While Arkins went up the hill to the cabin, it that it?"

He flashed a glance at Arkins. "Yes, but—"

"And then you heard a lot of gunshots from the cabin area—and then what—ran up to see what happened?"

"Yes, sir, but—" He heaved an exasperated sigh and looked at Arkins again.

"And Arkins told you he'd just shot Crumb and Belcher and you and he would share this nice fat reward?"

"I didn't want any part of it, but Al—" He broke off and stared at the wall behind me, almost reciting the rest of it. "Al said that since he was going to tell everyone that I shot one of the two rats that killed Doc, because I would have if I hadn't stayed back to radio Zerbo, that we'd split the reward."

"So you didn't know until a few minutes ago," I said, "that Doc Wharton had killed them and not Arkins?"

"Yes, sir, that's right, but—"

"What difference does it make?" Arkins said. He had stepped forward and was looking at Mason, not me. "You knew all along that nothin' that tricky would ever cross Johnny's mind. But like I said before"—now he was looking at me—"if I'd known Doc had kin, it'd never of crossed mine neither."

While Mason was staring bleakly at Arkins, Jellicoe was staring in wonder at me. And when Mason started to say something to Arkins, Jellicoe cut him off. "Mr. Train," he blurted, "do you drive a Dart automobile?" He had a glint in his eye, and something in his voice made us all look at him sharply.

"Yes, I do."

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"Is that—is that Doc Wharton's daughter sitting in it crying?"

I sighed. "Yes, it is."

"By golly!" Jellicoe's tanned face flushed suddenly. "I knew it was! By golly, I just *knew* it was!"

He was turning back to the door as he spoke, on the run, and the Sheriff stood up and bellowed, "Jellicoe!" and I took three clumsy steps after his retreating back with the idea in mind of tackling him from the rear. I want her, she's mine! this voice in my head said clearly and I felt my neck grow thick with blood. I stopped after the third step, teetering on my feet, and the three of us stood there in various attitudes, looking at each other and the empty door.

"I had a hell of a time," Arkins said finally, "gettin' him to leave her. I never seen him like that before, Harry. I think he's in love."

"Good God!" Mason said. "So it's finally happened." He sat heavily in his chair again, shrewd eyes on mine, until mine dropped. "How old is she, Mr. Train?"

"In the low thirties." My voice was a growl.

"A nice age for a lady to be. And how old—if you don't mind my askin'—are you?"

"I mind your asking, Mason."

"You're not married, are you?"

"I mind your asking that too. We've still got this matter to settle, Sheriff." My breath was audible as I sat down again.

"Well, let's settle it, then. I'll take your deal and so'll Arkins. Al, give him back the letter—and don't ask me what letter."

Arkins slipped the letter from inside his shirt and handed it to me, and he too was giving me the jaundiced eye as my blood took its own sweet time cooling down. He didn't seem in the least concerned about his double deception. "I imagine," he said reflectively, "she's a handsome girl when her face ain't all screwed up with grief."

"Mind my askin'," Mason said, "what she is to you, Mr. Train?"

"I mind."

Mason clutched his face again, speaking between splayed fingers. "Maybe somebody oughta go out there and put a hobble on Johhny, Mr. Train. I mean, we frown on claim-jumpin' up here—any kind." He eyed me closely. "How much you expect to get from her eight thousand?—now that's a fair question, sir."

"I told her I'd bring her up for the price of the gas."

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"Well, that could be a pretty penny, couldn't it? At least you're on a commercial basis with her—right?"

I should have said something flat and decisive right then, and cleared the air, but inside I was still waffling around like a wet-eared kid. She'd found a seam in my hide and slipped through to where I used to live, and I shouldn't have let her. Private eyes shouldn't allow themselves to make emotional ties with the civilian world. People aren't people to cops, even to ex-cops—they're suspects, or victims or perpetrators, present or future; they're cases. Cops have a terrible divorce rate and their kids are among the first to hit the skids. My mind ticked off the litany. And yet—

Mason bit the end off a cigar and lit it, taking his time giving me time. He was every bit as shrewd as he looked. "Arkins," he said finally, "maybe you'd better go get them two. We got to work out the details on this thing yet." When Arkins had gone, he said to me, "I've never been in on one of these reward deals, Mr. Train—how long's it usually take for the money to get here?"

"It varies, but not too long, Sheriff. Three weeks maybe."

He was making conversation, and I thought vaguely I'd like to come up sometime and go fishing with him. I bet he knew where every trout in the county was, and how to whistle it up.

Arkins appeared in the door. "They're gone," he said.

"What!"

"I said they're gone, Harry. Took off in Johnny's jeep."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Mason said, his eyes flicking to mine. But there was no reaction in me now, no inner voice; the seam was sealed tight again, the blood cool. They're not men and women, they're cases, open or closed. The perpetrators, I said to myself, have fled.

They'd gone to Madison's Funeral Parlor, the Sheriff found out, and then to Jellicoe's house to meet his mother. After that, his mother said over the phone, she didn't know where they'd gone, but she'd never seen Johnny so excited. And she said she liked the girl right off, a real nice girl—Doc's daughter, would you believe?—and tall enough for once. She made it sound as though she'd given her blessing to the trip, wherever it went, whatever it led to.

And I let Mason know that it had my blessing too, and I thought that Doc might join in the chorus himself, if he had a

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way of doing it. And maybe, I thought to myself, he'd left Mitzi more than he knew, more than just a little money.

I asked Mason where Doc Wharton's cabin was and on my way home I stopped by. It was about a hundred yards off the road, deep in the trees, and a slim finger of late sun touched the peak of the steep-sloped roof as I stood in the small clearing in front. Here the trails of three men had crossed and ended in the inexorable geometry of life.

The silence was a palpable living thing there, full of suppressed sound. You had the feeling it could burst into a mind-stunning roar at any moment and destroy you—as it had destroyed three men.

Doc's trail had ended here; and turning, to look outward, I thought that maybe Mitzi's had begun here.

I listened to the layered sound of silence for a while longer and then, in awe and some fear, took the next step along my own inexorable path.

"*Adutrumque paratus* to you too," I said cautiously.

And nothing happened.

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 460th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . . The author wrote this story "while recuperating from a dislocated shoulder incurred in a skiing mishap"—but the story has nothing to do with skiing. . .*

*Patrick Scaffetti is in his middle twenties, and teaches English and Spanish at a suburban junior high school. His wife, Sandi, is also a teacher. His hobbies, "besides writing, include tennis, golf, antique collecting, and reading."*

*To all new writers, young and old: take heed of the title of Mr. Scaffetti's first story. The secret is there—the only sure road to a successful writing career. . .*

# A MATTER OF PRACTISE

**by PATRICK SCAFFETTI**

Marion Howell showed up for her first golf lesson fifteen minutes late and some ten years younger than I had expected. She glanced around the clubhouse sullenly, then walked over to Louie who sat reading a girlie magazine behind the bar. I usually don't make predictions about my students before meeting them, but I'd golfed on and off with Phil Howell for the past eight years, and when he signed his wife up for golf lessons, I'd looked forward to instructing a chubby fiftyish type with salt-and-pepper hair. But my imagination had been way off base.

Marion was a petite well-proportioned blonde dressed in a white sleeveless blouse and a short matching skirt. Somehow I couldn't picture her as the wife of Phil Howell, a short squat bulldog of a man. Louie lifted his bald head reluctantly from his reading to see who was speaking to him, then took more of an interest when he found out. He jerked his head in my direction and followed her "Thanks" with a cheerful "Any time."

She came over to my table and said, "I'm Marion Howell. You're Keith Wolfe, the pro around here?"

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"Right. Pleased to meet you. All ready to start your first golf lesson?"

"Not especially, but then I really don't have much choice."

"Nobody's forcing you to be here," I said.

"Want to bet?"

"I don't follow."

"You mean Phil didn't tell you these lessons were a surprise birthday gift for me?"

"All he told me was that he wanted to sign you up for eight half-hour golf lessons. He didn't say anything about a birthday gift."

"He didn't mention that I hate the very thought of hitting a golf ball?"

"No, he didn't."

"Figures," she said bitterly. "Well, we may as well get started."

"Back up a minute. You're telling me that you don't want to be here, that the whole thing is Phil's idea?"

"That's pretty close."

"Well, look. No sense wasting both our time. I'll be happy to refund Phil's money, and he can try for another gift you might appreciate."

"No chance. He wants me to learn to play golf, and he won't take no for an answer. He even bought me a set of clubs."

"Have you tried telling him that you're just not interested?"

"I've told him a thousand times I don't want anything to do with golf, but he won't listen. When I suggested he get his money back for these lessons, he took turns sulking like a baby and shouting. He's convinced that once I start golfing, I'll love it as much as he does."

I nodded, trying to look sympathetic, but not knowing what to say. I'd played enough golf with Phil to know that it wasn't uncommon for him to act as she described when things didn't go his way. Finally I said, "Maybe I can tell him that you're just not cut out to be a golfer."

"That wouldn't do any good. I've been telling him that for years. I'm beginning to think that part of his pleasure comes from the fact that I don't want to play golf."

"Why's it so important to him that you learn the game?"

"His latest claim is that he wants us to share a common interest so that we can have more time together," she said distastefully. "But all he really wants is a handy partner who'll play golf

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with him at the drop of a hat. He's also got it in his head that it'll help me fit in with the right social crowd."

"And so he bought you lessons?"

"Yep."

"Well, if there's no way out, I'll try to make them as painless as possible," I said.

"Thanks, I'd appreciate that."

I lifted a bucket of golf balls from a corner of the bar and led the way out the back door to the driving range where I do my teaching. I took a 5-iron from Marion's bag and ran through the grip, stance, and basic swing. She worked hard at trying to follow my instructions, but her heart clearly wasn't in it.

I kept her an extra ten minutes to make up some of the time she'd missed, and she seemed relieved when I finally told her the lesson was over. Walking back to the clubhouse, she said, "I don't mean to take it out on you. I'm sorry if I was rude before, but I'm so sick of his bullying."

"That's okay," I replied. "I can understand how you feel."

"I doubt it, but thanks anyway."

We made arrangements for the second lesson to take place the following Saturday at the same time.

The next day, Sunday, I got to the course shortly after ten for my usual 18 holes with three guys I'd been golfing with for years. They were waiting for me in front of the clubhouse, watching the twosome in front of us teeing off. I was surprised to see that it was Phil and Marion. Phil had already hit and was waiting for Marion to play.

I looked on as she stiffly and awkwardly addressed the ball and swung her club. It came down a good three inches above the ball. Phil told her to keep her head down and her eye on the ball. She tried again with the same result. Phil repeated his instructions in a louder voice.

"I'm trying," said Marion.

"Not very hard you're not," snapped Phil.

She swung again with all her might and missed once more.

"I've never seen anyone as uncoordinated as you," he said in disgust.

"Look, why don't you just go on alone," said Marion in a pleading tone. "I'll wait for you in the clubhouse. I don't mind waiting alone."

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"You're not going to sit in there and vegetate. You're going to play golf. Now hit the damn ball. If you'd listen to me for once, we'd already be on the second hole." For the first time Phil glanced back and noticed us. He waved and said to Marion, "There's your teacher waiting to tee off after us. What do you think he's thinking?"

Marion looked over at us and smiled weakly.

"Now hurry up," barked Phil.

Marion swung and again wiffed.

"I swear I married an idiot," muttered Phil, turning to us. "You guys go on and play through. God knows when she'll get around to hitting that ball."

"She only had her first lesson yesterday," I said. "Give her time. She'll be okay."

"If she'd just do what I tell her to do, she'd be all right, but she won't."

Marion walked over to a bench near the entrance to the clubhouse and sat down. She seemed about to cry.

"Go easy on her, Phil," I said. "She's trying her best."

Phil turned and strode over to her. "The hell she is," he said.

My buddies teed off, and I shot last. As we pulled our carts toward the first hole, I looked back at Phil and Marion. He was standing in front of her, showing her how to hold the club. She was listening intently, her face a grim hard mask. I wondered why Phil had bothered to buy her lessons. It was plain that she was to play his way or else.

That was the last I saw of them that day.

Marion arrived on time for her lesson the following Saturday, but she didn't appear any more enthusiastic. I hesitantly asked her how the golf game had gone on Sunday.

"It was horrible," she said. "Phil has never been an easy person to live with, but he becomes a maniac on the golf course. I tried to tell him that I wasn't ready to play for real, but he wouldn't listen. He screamed at me every time I made a mistake. He even kept track of every time I swung that damn club. I ended up with a score of one hundred and twenty-seven for nine holes." She tried to laugh, but it came out as more of a grumble. "You've golfed with him, Keith. How can you stand it?"

"It's not always easy," I said. "He takes his game very seriously."

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"That's an understatement. Even after last week's disaster, he's talking about the two of us golfing tomorrow. My stomach clenches up like a fish just thinking about it."

"Well, let's try to get you to hit that ball," I suggested.

That morning I kept her an extra quarter of an hour, even though I had another student waiting. All the while we were together, she listened and did exactly as I said, but I could tell that she was only going through the motions. I'd never before had a student who so obviously hated the game of golf.

I made it a point to be at the golf course early the next morning. I really wasn't sure why, but I wanted to be there when Marion and Phil teed off. Perhaps it was a morbid curiosity about the married life of this unhappy couple, or maybe I just wanted to see how much Marion would take before exploding. I thought about my motives while I sat at a table near the window, drinking coffee and watching for them to arrive.

I didn't have long to wait. I spotted Phil striding up to the clubhouse shortly after ten. Marion followed several feet behind, tugging at her golf cart as though she were leash-training a full-grown German shepherd.

Phil came into the clubhouse to buy the tickets, but he didn't see me. I stayed where I was and watched him join his wife outside. He handed in the tickets and sat down beside Marion to wait for the threesome ahead of them to tee off. Phil talked constantly, and Marion sat mute, nodding occasionally and looking thoroughly miserable.

In a few minutes the first tee was free. Phil set up his ball, took a couple of practise swings, then drove his ball about 150 yards. He straightened the tee, set a new ball down, and waved Marion over. She pulled a 5-iron from her bag. Phil said something, and she exchanged the iron for a driver. She stood before the ball as I had taught her, but Phil came over and changed her stance. Marion followed his instructions without saying a word. She swung the club and missed the ball.

"Keep your head down, dammit," said Phil loud enough for me to hear him inside. "Keep your head down!"

Marion must have protested that I had taught her to stand differently because Phil bellowed, "I don't care what he said. Do what I tell you!"

Marion tried again. This time she nicked the top of the ball,

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and it rolled a few feet in front of the tee.

Phil stamped over to her, wrenched the club from her hands, and shouldered his way in front of her. "Now watch," he commanded. He addressed the ball and swung. The ball went soaring. When he looked back, his wife was staring at the ground. He grabbed her arm and yanked hard. "Pay attention, you idiot!" he bellowed.

Marion lifted her head and faced him. Her jaws were clenched tight and her eyes blazed with hatred. Phil ignored her expression and repeated the swing. Suddenly her face softened. She appeared almost relieved. I wondered what was running through her mind.

Phil thrust the club back into her hands and Marion addressed the ball. She brought the club back, down, and through in one smooth motion. Her ball soared into the distance, not far but straight.

"It's about time," said Phil. He left her standing at the tee as he grabbed his cart and began trudging after his ball.

Marion replaced her club and started after him. Watching her, I pondered again what that look had meant.

There was a remnant of that same expression on Marion's face when she entered the clubhouse for her next lesson. Her features seemed set in determination, but at the same time there was a relaxed quality, as if she had finally resigned herself to make the best of a bad situation.

She walked straight over to where I was sitting, smiled, and said, "I'm ready if you are."

"You certainly seem eager this morning," I remarked.

"I've come to the conclusion that I may as well get as much out of these lessons as I can. And maybe it'll get Phil off my back."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

We went out to the driving range, and I began the lesson by having Marion swing her club a few times. She swung with the same grace she had shown the previous Sunday.

"You've come a long way," I said.

"Thanks."

"For the first time you really seem interested in hitting a golf ball."

She stared blankly into the distance for a moment before speaking. "I should have taken this seriously right from the start. I've already wasted a couple of lessons."

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She made up for lost time that morning. She followed my instructions closely, and, at the end of the session, she was hitting straight with all her irons. When the lesson was over, she surprised me even more by renting a bucket of balls and practising at the driving range.

Marion's change of heart was not a temporary thing. She showed up on time for each of her five remaining lessons, and her ability, once she put her mind to it, impressed me. I found it hard to understand this sudden passion for golf. She had made it clear from the beginning that she detested the game, but now she was pushing herself to perfect her swing. She must have wanted to please Phil very badly or, at least, make him stop belittling her on the golf course.

I saw a good deal of Marion at the course. During the week I would often spot her at the driving range, hitting ball after ball, practising points from her most recent lesson, and nearly every Sunday she and Phil showed up to play nine holes.

One Sunday, when my buddies weren't able to play, Phil invited me to play with them. I accepted eagerly. I was curious to see how they behaved toward each other once they were off the first tee.

Phil's attitude toward Marion had changed considerably since the first time I overheard them. Before Marion learned the game, he had been cruel and mocking, but now that her ability was starting to rival his own, he was quiet. He spoke little when we were together at the tees, and he never complimented his wife on her good shots. He seemed sulky, as though he resented Marion's improvement.

At the fifth tee Phil sliced a shot onto the neighboring fairway. Muttering a curse, he trudged after the ball. Marion's shot and mine took us to the middle of our fairway. While we dragged our clubs behind us, I commented, "It looks like you're coming around to like this game."

She shrugged. "It's not so bad."

"You've certainly improved."

"I still need practise. The whole thing's a matter of practise."

"How does Phil feel about your playing?"

"I think he feels threatened. He wanted a handy partner he could beat, but now that I'm able to offer him a little competition, he's uncomfortable."

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"Some people are never happy," I said.

"I will be," said Marion, pulling a 4-iron from her bag. Her shot brought her to the edge of the green.

Marion's lessons ended the last Saturday in July. By this time her game was already well on its way. Many afternoons she could be found at the driving range, driving balls as if her life depended on perfecting her swing. Sometimes I would go up to her, but she was never talkative. Sweat streaming down her pretty face, she would answer my questions briefly, then turn away.

One afternoon when I was playing golf with Phil, I asked him what he thought of his wife as a golfing partner. His face turned grim.

"She's trying to drag me out to the golf course every other day now," he said. "I think I've created a monster. Or should I say you have."

"Remember the lessons were your idea."

"I know, I know," he replied. "Don't remind me."

I arrived at the course one Sunday morning to meet my friends as usual. They were waiting for me when I got there. Just like that Sunday several weeks before, we were to tee off right after Phil and Marion. Watching them, I was struck by the irony of the situation. Phil looked downcast, but Marion seemed at ease and eager to play. Both of their drives took them halfway over the first fairway.

We waited until they were on the green before shooting. I was no longer concerned with them moving too slowly and slowing down play.

There was some delay on the second fairway, and when we had all putted out, Marion and Phil were still waiting to drive.

When the green was finally clear and the flag replaced, Phil hit. His ball ended up in the middle of the fairway. Marion's shot landed nearby, a little ahead of his. Phil made no mention of the fact that she had outdriven him. Marion was smiling as they started after their balls.

Phil's second shot brought him into a clump of trees to the left of the green. Marion's ball followed his into the trees. I watched them set off together until they disappeared into the foliage.

We were waiting for them to reappear when suddenly Marion came rushing from the trees, waving her arms and shouting to us.

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We ran toward her and met her halfway.

"It's Phil," she gasped. "He moved into the way while I was shooting. The golf ball hit him on the side of the head. He's fallen over. I think he's unconscious."

We took off at a run toward the trees, but, as soon as I saw him, I knew that it was too late. His open eyes stared dully at the treetops as he lay crumpled on his side. A thick stream of blood ran from his temple into his hair.

"We'd better get some help here right away," I said, kneeling to feel his pulse. There was no heartbeat.

Marion was pale and trembling. "How is he?" she asked.

I didn't think she'd want me to lie, so I answered, "It doesn't look good."

Through her worried expression I thought I detected a fleeting gleam of triumph in her eyes.

"Oh, God, I'll never touch a golf club again," she said.

She wouldn't have to, I thought. Her lessons had paid off in full.

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 461st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . how one man protected himself and his wife from burglars . . .*

*The author, Edward Mañanitas (a pseudonym), was thirty-seven when he submitted his first story. He is a native-born American of Dutch Menonite ancestry. A mortgage banker on the west coast, he likes reading, films, and weightlifting, and holds a First Degree Black Belt in karate. He wrote us that his "life experiences have been varied and at times quite bizarre; but those are other stories" — which, in his smooth, easy, natural style, we hope they will be . . .*

# THE TENUOUS THREAD

### by EDWARD MAÑANITAS

Good evening. Welcome to my home. Please sit down and make yourself comfortable. Pour yourself a glass of sherry if you'd like. You know, we don't seem to get many visitors out this way, but we enjoy entertaining when someone does drop in. Comfortable? Good. I hope the sherry has put you in the mood for a little story. Listen carefully, now, for the details are important. This little tale will explain many things about me, and about this house.

I imagine that the first time you saw the estate you said to yourself, "Now there's a wealthy man's home if I ever saw one." But wait, my friend; don't assume that it was always so. Actually, I came from a poor family, and as a youngster I was shunned by my classmates as a "kid from the wrong side of the tracks." My father was a common laborer who worked in a mill, and he was killed in an accident there when I was 16.

Tell me: was growing up difficult for you? I suppose it is for everyone. For me it was terrible. I was covered with acne and stuttered, and my clothes were worn and patched. Like many lads in

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my neighborhood, I often worked at odd jobs in the evening to supplement our family's meager income, but it didn't help much.

When I was graduated from high school, it seemed that the only course open to me was the military service, so I joined the army as an infantryman. It made a man of me, and I was finally able to see that I could do just about anything that anyone else could, if I set my mind to it.

When I completed my military service, I took a series of manual labor jobs in the construction industry, and attended the local university at night. I must say I was still rather undisciplined. I just signed up for any courses I felt would be interesting or enjoyable. Oddly enough, my studies eventually led me to become quite an expert in a particularly thinly populated area of high finance known as factoring.

Although that was all more than 25 years ago, I can still remember clearly how I suffered as a lad, to say nothing of the herculean effort it required for a poorly educated laborer to rise to the level of financial entrepreneur with a net worth in excess of $2,000,000.

Before the rather spectacular success of my business, my wife and I lived in a rundown apartment in a slum neighborhood. It was then that we were first burglarized. The thieves took everything of value, including my wife's winter coat, and a television set we had saved a long time to afford. What they could not take, they ruined, even slashing our meager furniture with their knives. Raiding the refrigerator, they ate and drank whatever struck their fancy, dumping the rest of the food on the floor to be trampled underfoot as they carried our possessions out.

Shall I tell you how bitterly my wife cried, or how earnestly I swore vengeance against the animals who had ransacked our little apartment? Of course they were never caught. The police were disinterested almost to the point of not investigating at all. If any inquiry was every carried out, I certainly saw no sign of it.

Three years after the incident at the apartment, my business began to do very well. My wife and I were both working ten hours a day, but it was bringing real results for the first time. We had been able to purchase a nice split-level home in the suburbs, and we had bought some attractive and expensive furniture and art objects. We had also accumulated many personal possessions of great sentimental value, but of little material worth. Our birthdays and Christmases and anniversaries brought us an odd collec-

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tion of trinkets and bric-a-brac which often caused our less sensitive acquaintances to raise their eyebrows in shock that we would have such things lying about, where they clashed with our décor.

Surely you, as a sensitive person, can understand how such things can come to be irreplaceable. After all, a leather divan, a Nikon camera, or a Rolex watch are just things that are produced by the thousands, all alike, requiring only money to replace. If one is adequately insured, the theft or destruction of such things can be lived with, even if it is unpleasant. But what amount of insurance can replace a great work of art, a Renoir perhaps, after it has been cut from its frame by a clumsy thief with a pocketknife? And who can replace a worn set of gold wedding bands with 25 years of memories etched into them?

You've undoubtedly guessed that we were burglarized again. One night when we had worked late on a difficult business transaction, my wife took her car home to prepare our dinner while I stayed behind to conclude the day's work. Although we had taken precautions, such as strong locks and an alarm system, my wife walked into our home to find two burglars inside.

They kicked and beat her viciously, and then set fire to the house, apparently hoping to cover up the robbery. My wife, however, is a determined woman, and she managed to crawl from the burning house and save herself. After a period of weeks in the hospital she recovered from her physical injuries, but the pain of losing the mementos of our years of struggle has never left her.

But life goes on. When my wife was well enough to travel, I took her to a quiet little resort in Mexico for a long rest. We took walks on the beach, and talked, and lay in the sun, and her strength rallied. Yet I knew that it was unthinkable we would ever again live through such an experience, and I decided on a plan of prevention that I think you will find most interesting.

I telephoned an associate of mine and arranged for the purchase of a parcel of woodland acreage that I'd had my eye on for some time. An architect was engaged to submit preliminary designs for a 4,000-square-foot home to be built on the property, with the stipulation that each design was to be as burglarproof as possible.

I must say the architect did a fine job. The house is constructed of reinforced concrete and faced with stone. It is beautiful as well as functional, and was designed to blend nicely with its natural surroundings. At the flick of any one of three hidden switches, shutters of quarter-inch steel plate lock into place over all the

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windows, and over the rear door. The front door is of ornate hand-carved wood, with a simple knob and an inexpensive lock such as one finds in ordinary homes.

Friends and business associates often ask me why I have not protected the front door better, particularly in view of the very expensive furnishings and art we have recently collected. I always explain that the front door is wired to a burglar-alarm system, and besides, the area is well-lighted, and I feel that thieves would normally choose the more darkened areas around the house.

I don't really mind the chuckling and the head shaking and the half-overheard comments that any good burglar could slip the lock and shortcut the alarm system in a matter of seconds. I don't mind being considered naive. It has served me well in many a delicate business negotiation.

But then, I don't really need to explain the seemingly unprotected front door to my home. You realized some time ago, too late, that the tiled foyer floor was actually a trap door. The opening of the front door while the burglar alarm-system was operational triggered the mechanism. The release came when the locked door between the foyer and the rest of the house was tampered with.

The six-by-ten-foot concrete room in which you are trapped is furnished with a toilet, a closed-circuit television camera and screen, and indirect lighting. You will notice a small steel cylinder mounted in the wall next to the door. The cylinder has a cut-out in one side and the cylinder rotates. Thirty days' supply of preserved food has been provided in the automatic mechanism, which operates once per day on a time clock. Let us hope that my vacation in Bermuda lasts no more than 30 days.

There is absolutely no chance of escape. You may scream yourself hoarse if you choose; no one will hear you. If you have a gun, I suggest you do not use it. A ricocheting bullet is not a friendly cellmate, and the sound might deafen you.

In short, your fate hangs by a very tenuous thread. If someone has seen you fall into my little trap, and reports it, the police will investigate, and I shall turn you over for trial. If not, we shall have televised conversations occasionally. Perhaps someone else will join you in your new home. Then you will be able to talk to someone of your own kind on subjects of mutual interest.

This has been a prerecorded announcement and will replay automatically every fifteen minutes.

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## DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

*Jean Darling's first story, "Never To Be Lost Again," appeared in the August 1975 issue of EQMM. Ms. Darling has worked hard to publish her second story, and has come up with a detailed study of a carefully-planned crime in Dublin. Although more leisurely in style, and less powerful in impact, the story has a mounting suspense that will remind you of Cornell Woolrich's approach — the seemingly commonplace, everyday events that become threads in a tapestry of fate, in the pattern that reveals each person's moment of truth . . .*

# THE MAN WHO EMBEZZLED FROM HIMSELF

**by JEAN DARLING**

Patrick Xavier Kavanagh came from County Cork. Now, as every Dubliner will tell you, Cork men are a pretty tricky lot, and, before going any further, I might as well state that Paddy Kavanagh was definitely a man to keep your eye on. You see, his ambition was to make his fortune by embezzling from himself—quite a tall order at the time since he did not have two ha'pennies to rub together.

To his way of thinking there was no possibility of ever making big money by working for a boss and, as the joke says, he was too nervous to steal. Also, the prospect of making mailbags at Mountjoy Prison, should he be caught, held no charm. Institutional life had lost its appeal for the boy who had been stranded beneath a church pew, swaddled in the early edition of the Cork *Examiner*. The good brother who took him under his wing dubbed him Patrick Xavier because they were both good Catholic names and Kavanagh because a certain dampness of young Patrick's literary garment had drawn attention to a furniture shop called Kavanagh's which was advertising a monster sale.

By the time orphanage days were past, the boy had reached the

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conclusion that somehow he must become the owner of a shop if he were going to steal from himself. There was only one business he knew of where people were daft enough to trust their valuables to an utter stranger. This, therefore, was *the* business for him. But getting this particular kind of shop wasn't going to be easy; he needed extensive knowledge and experience.

A year with the Coin Depot in Cork City familiarized him with numismatics. Six months of helping an alcoholic stamp collector prepare his albums for auction, so as to continue his affair with the bottle, taught Paddy the basics of dealing in postage stamps. At 18 he hitched a ride to Limerick City where he heard that an auction house was looking for a willing worker. He got the job of polishing, cleaning, and learning.

Every penny above bare necessities went for books. Every spare minute was spent studying furniture, paintings, hallmarks, the work of silver-, gold-, and platinum-smiths, precious stones, and jewelry in general. An easy familiarity with these subjects was the basic requirement if he ever were to achieve his ambition of becoming an antique-dealer auctioneer. Unless he became outstanding in the field, merchandise left to be auctioned by his firm never would reach such proportions as to make a moonlight flit worth while.

When the urge for greener fields sent him thumbing across Ireland to Dublin, Paddy was 21, over six feet tall and good-looking enough to flutter feminine hearts. Black hair tumbled unruly curls above steady blue eyes and his tongue could charm the birds off the trees, as the saying goes.

Neither knowledge nor appearance helped him to get a job on that first day in Dublin. He tried every antique shop and auctioneer ranged along the River Liffey that slashed Dublin in half from east to west. But when he opened his mouth and let the Cork accent escape, the answer was always the same—no. That night he slept rough.

Next day he was back again. There were other shops besides those along the Liffey quays, but they were either too scruffy like the ones on Clanbrassel Street or too elegant like those on Anne or Molesworth. Eventually he would own one of the latter shops on the fashionable south side of Dublin, but first he had to find a job.

It was one P.M. Wednesday and the shops were all closing for the afternoon—it was half day in the city. Metal doors were being

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pulled down and wire window guards were being fastened into place when a voice stopped Paddy in his tracks. "Hey, young f'la, would you be still after wantin' a job?" a man said between thumps of the hammer he was using to put up an AUCTION TONIGHT sign.

Paddy almost fell over his feet in his anxiety to get to the shop before anyone else should beat him to it. "Don't break a leg!" the man laughed. "All you do is hold up the lots during the bidding. Ten bob the night, okay?"

Paddy nodded, afraid that if he spoke his benefactor might snatch back the offer.

"Be here tonight, half six," the man said, going inside the shop and closing the door. Kavanagh was delirious with joy at this unexpected windfall—ten shillings in his present financial condition was a magnificent sum, enough to pay for several nights' bed and breakfast at the Salvation Army Hostel. . .

Twelve years later in the cabin of his fifty-foot sloop, nothing was further from Patrick Xavier Kavanagh's mind than bed and breakfast at the Salvation Army. The sailing ship, *Star of Erin,* was Paddy's pride and joy. Sleek, fast, with a Mercedes auxiliary engine in case the wind dropped, the craft glowed with teak and polished brass. She had taken him to Europe, North Africa, and the Canaries. Ostensibly Paddy's trips were vacations. In truth they had been preparation for the time when the responsibilities of a shop owner would be abandoned for the life of a wealthy wanderer. It was necessary to be able to sail single-handed—there was no room in Paddy's plans for a partner in his self-imposed exile.

At this particular moment he was anchored off Ireland's Eye, watching molten gold bubble in a small smelter. Ranged on the table before him was row on row of one-ounce bars of gold and platinum. To one side sat a chamois bag fat with unset gems. The stones had been pried from their settings which had then been cut up for melting. He poured the last panful of gold into the molds and turned off the smelter.

While waiting for things to cool, he carefully cleaned up all traces of his labors with flannel cloths which went into a sack along with the jewelers' tools he had used. The floor was searched for any truant stones that might have leaped away when freed from their prongs. He couldn't afford to lose one of those—they

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were what would bring the real money.

Paddy touched the smelter; it was cool enough to go into the bag with the molds, rags, and tools to be jettisoned. Nothing must remain on board to reveal this night's work. He gloated at his gleaming booty, loathe to hide it. At last his ambition was realized—he was about to embezzle and abscond from himself.

Sighing, the man knelt on the deep-piled rug and felt along the base of the starboard bulkhead. To the eye there was nothing to indicate any opening, not so much as a hairline; but after a moment a strip of teak came away, exposing a long shallow cavity. Into this went the metal bars and the chamois bag. He replaced the strip of teak. On deck he upped anchor and dropped the sack overboard.

Tacking until the wind caught her sails the *Star of Erin* slipped smoothly through the water toward home. She was moored at Skerries Yacht Basin next to the *Esmeralda*, a twenty-six-foot Hickey-built cabin cruiser belonging to Robbie. The thought of his partner saddened the dark-haired man at the wheel. If it hadn't been for Robbie, Paddy would have left after the first auction at the Mansion House.

He glanced at his watch; almost six A.M. Everything was right on schedule. A thirty-minute drive into Dublin, a few hours of sleep, then one more Saturday afternoon working on the books. He didn't know how he was going to get through the last dinner with Robbie, knowing that he'd never see him again, that at midnight he was going to weigh anchor with more than £200,000 in gems and negotiable bars cleverly hidden away.

Supplies, clothes, everything, including a brand-new rubber dinghy, were on board, as were the cans of paint and the pieces of splintered wood. Sometime during the dark before Sunday dawn he would paint white over the green stripe around the bow and alter the sloop's name to *Stargazer* to match the Panamanian registration. The Irish papers would be burned, the ashes scattered to the winds. Later, the wooden dinghy would be set adrift, the pieces of white-painted wood dropped overboard. When that was done, Patrick Xavier Kavanagh, wonder boy of the auction world, would be just another statistic—amateur yachtsman lost at sea.

All during the drive back to Dublin, Robbie's face hovered wraithlike in his mind, the brown eyes filled with hurt. It was as though he were walking out on a father, throwing him away just as Paddy had been thrown away. But if he didn't go now, the

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whole premise of his existence would be a joke on himself. Since he could remember, every move had been toward a single goal—to prove that a penniless orphan could beat the establishment in one master stroke.

Elocution lessons for purer speech, dramatic lessons for ease of movement, expensive custom-made suits—all had been careful preparation for his new life. He couldn't throw all that away, even for ten years of friendship, even for a father. It was with relief that he recalled that the decision was out of his hands, had been since the first stone had been prized from its setting.

When at last he fell into bed, sleep would not come. It wasn't excitement that kept him awake, it was guilt. Guilt about Robbie. He thought of the first time he saw Robbie's shop. It was during the lean months when he was still country-crude from Limerick. He had gravitated to Molesworth Street, a moth to a flame. Sandwiched between two ordinary-looking antique shops, not far from Dawson Street, Robbie's Antiques looked like an illustration out of a Dickens story. Crystal chandeliers, Georgian silver, fragile Louis Quinze chairs, ormolu clocks lit by candle-flame bulbs shimmered like jewels in the early dark of late autumn. The lonesome boy stood spellbound before the small blown-glass panes of the window.

It wasn't until much later that he realized how ideally located the shop was to capture the tourist trade. With Buswell's Hotel at one end of the street, the Royal Hibernian Hotel at the other, and the Hotel Shelbourne within two blocks' walking distance, Robbie's was a shopping must, particularly for Americans.

From the moment Paddy saw the place he wanted to work there so badly he could taste it. He wracked his brain trying to figure a way to wangle himself a job with James Robbie. When at last his wish was granted it happened in such an ordinary fashion he couldn't believe his luck. One afternoon Robbie came to an auction in the place on the quay where Paddy worked. Before the sale began he talked with the young man, was impressed, and offered him a job. It was as easy as that.

Under Robbie's tutelage Paddy learned the antique business inside out. He learned how to judge browser from buyer, the intricasies of facial English, the moue, the nuance. He learned how to zero in at the exact moment to conclude a deal. He learned never to let a customer go away angry—a happy customer was a walking advertisement.

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Soon the glow of actually working at Robbie's wore off and Paddy was anxious to push ahead with his plan. He suggested extending the business by having auctions. Robbie felt that the nuisance and expense of added staff plus all the paperwork would outweigh any profit. "It's a nice little shop," Robbie said. "The buying trips are a pleasure now, but if there were auctions it would be pressure, pressure, pressure to find suitable merchandise all the time. I've had enough pressure." He went back to polishing a Victorian candlestick.

If the stubborn old fool wouldn't do things his way, Paddy would get rid of him. Nothing was going to stand between Patrick Kavanagh and his goal. But before anything in that line could be concluded, Robbie, who was alone in the world, would have to make a will in Paddy's favor.

"If anything should happen to you," Paddy broached boyishly, "this whole business would fall apart." It was late and they were doing inventory.

"Should something happen?" Robbie asked.

"Sure and if the shop was mine I'd take good care of it," Paddy pressed wistfully.

"You take good care of it when it isn't yours," Robbie said, counting silver forks. "Ah, one is missing. So soulless to steal from a set over a hundred years old."

Once he asked straight out if Robbie didn't think it would be a good idea to name him his heir.

Robbie smoothed non-existent hair across the top of his head and shrugged.

Frustrated, Paddy blurted, "You're not planning to leave all this to a home for cats?"

"You've got something against cats?" Paddy felt uneasy before Robbie's puzzled gaze.

He never mentioned the subject again. It would have been easier if the old fool had cooperated, but Kavanagh would write out a will himself, if it came to that. And it did. He purchased a Last Will and Testament form at a stationer's and began to practise forging Robbie's signature. There's no real hurry, he thought, I'll just wait until the time is right.

Though neither prude nor celibate, Paddy always had been a loner. Marriage would have got in the way of his ambition. He knew that if he ever had a kid, nothing could induce him to desert it as he had been deserted. His policy was to consciously steer

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clear of emotional involvement. And then Robbie collapsed.

Paddy had been watching the little man wipe fingermarks from the open glass door with his handkerchief. By this time next week you'll be dead, he thought, patting the forged will in his pocket. He didn't have the stomach to do the murder with his own hands. But he wasn't too squeamish to tap Robbie on the head to put him to sleep, or to shove him out of the car onto a busy road during the lull before the pubs closed for the night. It pleased him that a stranger would do the actual killing—probably a hit-and-run. There certainly were enough of those; practically every day someone was advertising in the papers for witnesses to a hit-and-run accident. Suddenly Robbie half turned, reaching toward Paddy, his mouth moving soundlessly; his knees buckled and he fell to the ground like a stone.

"Robbie, Robbie!" Paddy ran to the fallen man. He turned him over and loosened his collar. "Oh, my God! I can't hear a heartbeat!" he said, ear to Robbie's chest. With tears streaming down his face, Kavanagh dialed 999.

A few rainproofed passersby paused to gape at the stricken man being bundled into the ambulance. "You can't die, damn you! You can't die," Paddy said to the motionless, blanketed figure.

"Don't worry," comforted the ambulance driver. "The old man'll be all right, God willing."

"He's not old! Fifty-eight's not old!" Paddy shouted after the wailing ambulance.

It seemed like days before he was allowed to see Robbie, a shrunken mound enclosed in an oxygen tent. His face was gray, like the fringe around his bald head. The arched nose that curved with such pride above generous lips looked thin and sharp. Saliva bubbled in the corner of his mouth, caught in the paralysis of the stroke.

"All he needs is rest and care," the doctor told Paddy when the oxygen tent had been removed and Robbie was breathing on his own. The gray had left his skin and he was beginning to look more like his old self. Paddy, on the other hand, had aged perceptibly. His chin was smudged with stubble, his clothes were mussed. He hadn't left the hospital since he'd locked up the shop the day Robbie had been admitted.

"Paddy?" Robbie called.

"I'm here, right here."

"Go home. Rest," Robbie whispered. "I'm all right now."

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But Paddy couldn't leave this man he'd planned to murder. The only person for whom he'd ever cried. The only person to penetrate the wall erected by the orphan child to shield the man. He stayed until Robbie was well enough to sit up and tick him off for letting the business slide into bankruptcy.

In six months nobody would have guessed Robbie had ever been sick in his life; but he didn't come back to the shop, except for the odd day. His time was spent aboard the *Esmeralda,* wandering around the Irish coastline.

One morning Robbie came to Paddy with a contract. It gave the young Irishman the option of purchasing ninety percent of Robbie's Antiques, over a period of ten years. "You'll get the other ten percent in my will." Robbie twinkled like a mischievous child. "Have to keep a finger in the pie!" Patrick signed the contract and two months later auctions were introduced into the business. Patrick's plan was moving along.

During the next few years a small monthly auction conducted in the shop grew into huge two- and three-day events held at the Mansion House. Dealers and private buyers flew in from all over the world for the sales. Robbie's was fast becoming the Irish equivalent of Sothebys, Christie's, and Parke-Bernet. Now that none of the responsibility fell to him, Robbie enjoyed being a partner in the rapidly expanding business.

When a ship builder went bankrupt and Robbie's was called in to manage the liquidation sale, Paddy took another step toward his goal. He acquired the *Star of Erin.* Robbie fell in love with her at first sight and, forsaking rotund little *Esmeralda,* spent more time aboard the *Star* than Paddy did. Aside from taking trips to learn the business of sailing, Kavanagh had no time to waste in playing yachtsman.

Then, one wintry afternoon in January, an unusually large estate, to be settled by auction, was literally dropped into his lap. It consisted of Georgian furniture, a collection of gold and platinum coins and medals, a solid-gold dinner service for 24, and an assortment of fabulous jewelry. One piece alone had 32 flawless one-carat emeralds set in a heavy platinum collar. The auction could realize as much as £1,000,000. Patrick Xavier Kavanagh's moment of truth had arrived.

The sale was set for the last Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday in March. The coins, plate, and jewelry would be put on the block on Friday. By four o'clock in the afternoon the sale would be over.

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Paddy's caper depended on the buyers' taking advantage of Robbie's highly advertised million-pound insurance policy against theft. He was certain the buyers would leave their purchases in the safety of Robbie's safes over the weekend.

Most of the buyers, unwittingly, fell in with Paddy's plans. When the auction was over, ninety percent of the coins and jewelry and all the plate were bundled back into the safes of Robbie's by the Armoured Van Company, to be locked up until Monday morning.

"You're sure you don't want something to eat?" Paddy asked as he drove Robbie home after the sale.

"Did you see that pile of checks?" Robbie laughed. "Ah, my nerves won't stand such riches! No, thank you, my boy, I'll go right home. I'm not used to an honest day's work any more."

"If you don't feel up to it, don't come in tomorrow," Paddy told him. If he didn't come in it would lessen the chance of discovery.

"Don't worry, Paddy, I won't let you down."

After dropping Robbie off, Paddy went back to the shop. He had a long night's work ahead of him; everything had to be melted down and hidden before Saturday dawned. The slight possibility that the safes would be opened and found empty was a risk he had to take. When he set sail late Saturday night, everything had to be shipshape. It wasn't too unusual, in these days of weapons and explosives being smuggled into Ulster, for a ship to be boarded and searched.

He took out the jewelry first and put it beside his attaché case in the trunk of the car. The case bulged with foreign currency removed from his safety-deposit box that morning. The small fortune it contained was the result of systematic neglect in recording certain transactions throughout his association with Robbie. It had been done cleverly—not once had his friend discovered any discrepancy in the books.

The gold dinner service followed the jewelry into the car, but when Paddy went back to raid the second safe, he couldn't bring himself to leave Robbie high and dry. The insurance would cover what was already in the car. So Patrick Kavanagh left untouched the coins and checks, as well as the cash, and sped out past Dublin airport to Skerries and the *Star of Erin*.

The next afternoon found the two men silently checking deposit checks and cash against auction lot numbers. They had been working since early afternoon and hardly had reached the half-

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way mark. "Ah, such a handwriting!" Robbie rose from the desk. Attracted by the movement, Paddy glanced up to see him standing by the safe. "A fellow who writes that bad should clean streets." Robbie turned away from his friend, his hand resting on the dial of the empty safe. "I want to check some of the lot numbers," he said. His hand began to turn the dial.

Cold sweat crawled along Kavanagh's body. What could he do? What could he say? What possible excuse could explain an empty safe? Paddy watched the dial go around again.

"Ah! I've forgotten the combination." Robbie thumped his forehead. "I'll start again. You say the numbers, Paddy." He spoke without turning. Automatically the Irishman repeated the combination that would reveal his treachery.

Kavanagh's fingers crept to the auctioneer's gavel. They tightened around the brass-bound mallet. Success was too near to let scruples stand in the way. He half rose in his chair, body forward, gavel raised to strike, to come down *CRACK* and split the bald head like a melon. Robbie, concentrated on his task, was unaware of the imminent danger.

A sudden weakness dropped Patrick back in the chair, trembling. The gavel slipped from his fingers. The shiny bald head was still intact. He hadn't been capable of killing Robbie.

His friend turned to the fourth digit. Kavanagh watched, fascinated, a snake watching a mongoose. The world was condensed into a single hand turning, first left, then right, ever nearer to Paddy's destruction. One final turn, a slight click, and the lock would be open.

Patrick felt as though his chest were being squeezed in a vise. Blood pounded in his temples as the hand lowered to the handle. It rested there, then Robbie's voice came from far away.

"With that army you hired getting paid good money every week, why should we work?"

The dial spun, relocking the safe. "Come, my boy, we'll get something to eat at the hotel," Robbie said, shrugging into his coat.

After dinner Robbie went off by himself to see a show at the Gate Theatre. Standing in O'Connell Street, watching his little friend bounce out of sight, Kavanagh felt strangely empty. After all the years of planning and waiting he was free to embark on a splendid new life. But there was none of the exhilaration he had

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expected. He felt the same pang as when, long ago, he had watched other children go home with new parents.

The left front tire blew just before he reached the turnoff for Dublin airport. Cursing himself for not putting the spare and tools back in the trunk and thanking God that help was so near, Paddy trundled the car into the gas station.

"It's not my job, I don't fix flats," the attendant whined but, with the help of a couple of pound notes, Paddy eventually talked him into opening the garage. It took an eternity to get another tire on the car.

By the time Paddy was on his way again, the ten o'clock news was half over. It was almost impossible to keep his foot from pressing the car beyond the speed limit to escape the demons that had begun to pursue him. He felt as though he was swathed in neon tubes, flashing, *I'M THE ONE! I DID IT!*

The road sped away on either side of the headlights as he passed through Skerries' main street. He turned right around the triangle on which the charming thatched cottage had stood in the way of progress until some traffic expert had it torn down.

Kavanagh slammed on the brakes—the narrow street ahead was choked with police cars. He tried to reverse, only to have a Black Maria block the way. The quay, where the *Star*'s dinghy rocked gently, was striped with searchlights. Paddy pulled behind a squad car with the blue light winking in counterpoint to the crackling radio. He got out and locked the car.

Upstairs, Paddy found the Yacht Club bar empty—he supposed the usual crowd was somewhere below watching the excitement. He got a pint of Guinness from the bartender, who was engrossed in a comic book. Paddy sipped the stout slowly, feeling that at any moment a hand would come down heavily on his shoulder, putting an end to all his plans.

After a bit he moved over to the window to watch the activity around the quayside. Uniformed men milled about as one man was shouting something over a bullhorn. Suddenly a group broke away, pointing to the window in which Paddy was standing. And then they began hurrying toward the Yacht Club.

It was all he could do to keep from panicking. He would have run had there been anywhere to run. Unless he could reach the *Star of Erin* there was no hope of escape. If it really was Paddy whom the police were after, the harbors and airports would be sealed as tight as drums. There'd be roadblocks all over the place.

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Even unapproved roads to the north would be blocked. Nothing made the Irish police happier than setting up roadblocks.

The men were pounding up the stairs fast and in another minute he'd be trapped. Kavanagh stepped into the men's room and locked himself inside one of the cubicles. His hand went to the Australian passport that had been so difficult and expensive to procure in Tangiers on his last trip. He thought of tearing it up and flushing it down the toilet.

The men's room door banged open. After a long minute one of the men sighed his relief.

"Thanks be to God!" voiced another.

"A regular bomb factory down there and them livin' in the middle of it," a third voice said.

"Provisional IRA. Gelignite. Over a ton of the stuff!" They were washing their hands.

"And mortar bombs and bomb parts. Enough to blow O'Connell Street across the Irish Sea!"

"Did you see that yoke puttin' out to sea?" the first voice said. "Too much money and no sense. It's a wonder he didn't swamp." The door slammed and the voices dwindled away.

Paddy splashed cold water on his face, glad he hadn't destroyed the passport. "If they're not after you now," he told his reflection, "you'd better get going before they are!" He ran down the stairs and through the police lines unchallenged. He had to get under way as soon as possible.

When Kavanagh reached the place where the *Star of Erin* should have been riding at anchor, she was nowhere to be seen. The *Esmeralda* rocked placidly alone. Perhaps, by some fluke, he had tied up at the wrong mooring. Perhaps she'd slipped her hawser and drifted out to sea.

Paddy sat in the bar at the Yacht Club trying to figure out just where he'd slipped up. What had been the fatal error, the unknown factor he hadn't made allowance for? "Fill 'er up again, Mickey." He pushed his glass toward the young man who had evidently finished his comic book.

Suddenly the boy's face lit up. "Oh, Mr. Kavanagh, I forgot to give you this before," he said, sliding an envelope in front of Paddy. "I was told to post it on my way home, but as long as you're here." Paddy moved over to the coal fire, staring stupidly at the neatly typed address:

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Patrick Kavanagh, Esq.,
Robbie's Antiques,
Molesworth Street,
Dublin, 2.

He sat down in the old armchair and lit a cigarette. After a while he tore open the envelope and read:

Dear Paddy,

When you read this I will be gone and so will the *Star of Erin*. Long ago, when I was a young man, I decided the only way to beat the system was to simply disappear with the merchandise. Trouble was, until you came along there was never enough merchandise to make disappearing worthwhile. I almost changed my mind about going because I did not want to leave you, who has been like a son to me. But if I don't go now, it will be too late. My age is against me. Besides, I promised my wife we would go around the world someday. If I go, at least I'll be keeping half of my promise. I have taken all the cash and the checks, also the buyer's list so the banks can't stop payment on the checks. The coins I took because always I have wanted a fine collection. So I will sit aboard your lovely *Star* and enjoy. The insurance will cover everything. Take care of *Esmeralda*. Goodbye, my son, and please do not think too badly of your

Robbie

## DETECTIVERSE

### *ENVIRONMENTAL, MY DEAR WATSON*

*by R. C. SHEBELSKI*

Some crimes defy common solution.
Take poison—in any dilution—
When applied to the rich
Often falls in the niche
Of death by acute *heir* pollution!

© *1977 by R. C. Shebelski.*

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**a *NEW* short story by**
**GEORGES SIMENON**

***first publication in the United States***

*Something different from Georges Simenon, creator of Inspector Maigret . . . not a bulldoggish manhunt in the streets and bistros of Paris—rather what might be termed a "moody murder." Was it a dream or a nightmare come true? For years Boussus had dreaded a possible confrontation with the man he had doubly wronged. And now — was it happening? . . .*

# THE MAN FROM OUT THERE

***by GEORGES SIMENON***

***(translated by Suzie deSurvilliers and Bolton Melliss)***

If you ever land in this paradise that is the island of Porquerolles, a few miles south of the sleeping Hyères, it is possible they may tell you different stories about the sinking of *The Mirrored Armoire.* It is even possible, depending on whether you speak to Chief Skipper Grimaud, to Pirate's-Head-Tadot, to the Nerve, to Maurice-the-Bouillabaisse, or to others you will find playing cards in the shade of the meager eucalyptus in the square, that you will hear still other accounts.

I would have you know that none of them is lying. But, lacking knowledge of the *only* truth, they imagine various "truths." And as time goes on there will be still more . . .

As to the exact time it happened, there is no evidence at all. The church clock which, among other things, tells its own whimsical hours, is several kilometers from the headland of Mèdes. This promontory is itself a good distance from the Notre Dame farm; and the people of the farm—that day, as on any other—

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were bent over in the burning light of the vineyards. Might one perhaps have been able, with binoculars, to witness the tragedy from the deck of a warship anchored in the bay of the Salines?

The fact remains that Boussus—the big Boussus, as he was called—had left his flowering home on the square and arrived at the harbor about six in the morning, dressed in pajamas, his dirty feet in espadrilles, and a straw hat like a helmet on his head. He hadn't shaved or washed. In a basket he was carrying a bottle of the rosé wine of the island, a two-pound loaf of bread, a can of anchovies in piquant sauce, and a thick slice of roquefort cheese.

Casimir, who had drawn up his nets at dawn, saw him board his ship, the *Royal Girella*, better known as *The Mirrored Armoire*. As on every night, the motor made a fuss before starting. While it was warming up, Boussus settled himself astern, under a striped red-and-yellow awning, opened his folding chair, made sure his boulter fishing lines were in order, and took out of the water the container of hermit crabs he was going to use for bait.

A short time later the *Royal Girella*, not over six meters long (in the country they said twenty-eight shirt tails long), was cutting the silken water in the direction of Mèdes, at the extreme tip of the island.

Boussus had his place to fish and he never changed it. The headland of Mèdes is a sheer rock, out of sight of all habitation. Barely twenty meters farther out a rocky peak emerges from the deep water.

"My beach umbrella," Boussus liked to say of this peak which provided his shade.

Once there, exploring the sea floor through the transparent water, he let go the stone tied to a rope which he used as an anchor. He broke open the hermit crab shells, settled himself in his folding chair, and paying out his lines, started to fish.

One thing is certain: at nine o'clock there were in his basket, which he kept covered with a wet cloth, about forty girellas, twenty orange sérans, five hogfish (more brown than red with their bristling spines), and three blue-and-green iridescent serres.

The Porquerolles bottle of wine, always within Boussus' reach, had been sampled often. The can of anchovies in piquant sauce was empty. The sun was already high. And the sea, without a ripple under the breezeless sky, rose in a swell that was smooth and slow, like the breast of a young woman sighing.

Some residents of Porquerolles have mentioned two bottles of

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wine, others three. The fact remains that they found only one. Boussus had just pulled in one of his boulter lines on which two sérans were hooked. Bending over, he could see, at the bottom of the clear water, the rocks he recognized as clearly as a peasant who recognized the smallest details of his field—the shady holes, the algae, the schools of girellas as agile and silly as young goats.

Not a soul was in sight. Not the faintest hum of a motor. No one on land or sea.

And yet a voice suddenly called out, "Mimile!"

Now, Boussus was not startled. He only said to himself, I knew it!

No one, for 25 years, had called him Mimile. No one in Porquerolles knew that long ago it had been his nickname. And no one now was anywhere in his field of vision.

Nevertheless, he slowly raised his head. His eyes, still shielded by sunglasses, scanned the landscape. And, like Cain in the past, he thought of nothing better than to stammer, "Where are you?"

"Mimile."

One of the sérans slipped from his fingers. It was already lost because, pulled up from a depth of twenty meters, it would soon die and be found floating belly up.

"Mimile."

At that moment there was a sound of lapping waves. From behind the rock that sheltered the *Royal Girella,* a flat-bottomed fishing boat—a *bette,* as they say in the south—appeared silently, with a man sitting alone in the middle.

"It's you," declared Boussus.

Did he, or didn't he, say it? The fact remains that his lips moved and he had the illusion of speaking. Just as he had the illusion of leaning over and taking from a handy drawer a loaded gun that he always kept there.

At this, the other one in his flat boat, who had rested on his oars and was drifting within a few meters of the *Royal Girella,* appeared to murmur in a hurt tone, "What are you afraid of?"

"I knew you were going to come back."

"Because the newspapers said so? I still could have gone anywhere else."

"I knew you would come here. I knew you would find my address."

"Don't shoot, Mimile."

"What do you want of me?"

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"I've come to say hi—to an old pal. Isn't it natural, after all this time, to say hi to a buddy?"

The sky was turquoise, the sea opaline, with its slow and tranquil breathing, like the very rhythm of nature. The boats were now riding idly. The water rose and fell along the rocks, showing wet areas of green moss and shells.

But it was the man in the flat-bottomed boat who showed the greatest tranquillity, even beatitude. For months, for years, Boussus had been wondering: "Will I recognize him when he comes?"

A man 22 years old at their last encounter and lean as a stray cat. How long since then? Twenty-five years. Twenty-five years of penal servitude out there in Guyana.

For months he had been checking all strangers who landed on the island and had asked himself, Does he look like Mauvoisin?

Perhaps he now had only one eye. Or a broken nose, or cauliflower ears, or a gruff voice, or a crippled body.

How would Mauvoisin act? As someone hateful, savage, impatient for revenge?

But there was the man in the flat-bottomed boat saying simply, in a soft, half-shy voice, "Hi, friend."

With Boussus, trying to force a grin, mumbling, "Hi."

"You see? I came only to say hello."

There was no irony, no hint of menace. It was peace on earth or, rather, on sea.

"You have a very pretty boat, Mimile."

Mimile was embarrassed, as he was when a pretty woman paid him a compliment. Did Mauvoisin know that, in the country, his boat was nicknamed *The Mirrored Armoire?* Did he know that only Boussus defended it against the jibes of people like Chief Skipper Grimaud, Pirate's-Head-Tadot, and all the others at Maurice's Golden Isles Café?

"I fixed it up by myself," he murmured.

Boussus was large, fat, and soft, and his huge thighs forced him to walk in a straddle. He liked his comfort and his conveniences—which was why he had a striped awning over his boat's stern, why he had rigged up a diminutive cabin with an armoire, some drawers, a mini-icebox, and some cushions.

As they were saying on the island: "Weighted with all that heavy superstructure, the boat will sink like a stone. Besides, it's no longer a boat. It's a mirrored armoire."

Mauvoisin was the only one to admire it.

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"A very beautiful boat, Mimile. If we had only had it in the Mediterranean, in San Quentin."

Boussus was still distrustful. But no, it wasn't the former Mauvoisin he saw before him, or the Mauvoisin he had feared.

"Twelve of the most dangerous convicts have just escaped from Guyana and have tried to reach Venezuela in a rowboat," the newspapers had printed.

And then: "Seven of them have been eaten by sharks."

Finally: "Among those reported as having succeeded in reaching San Marguerite, exhausted, starved, without water for eight days, is Jules Mauvoisin, the killer of the cashier of the San Quentin Wire Works."

It was that very Mauvoisin who was now showing himself as gentle as a lamb. He was speaking without hate, almost with the sentimentality of a drunk. His hair had turned white as snow. His complexion, too, was white and his eyes were pallid—he looked very small and very thin in the middle of his baby-blue *bette.*

"I am very happy, Mimile, that you ran off. I was always saying to myself out there, 'I hope Mimile got away! You have a beautiful boat. They say you own a pretty house on the square."

Boussus, himself like a sentimental drunk, felt his heart melting.

"It's true. It's the prettiest one, Mauvoisin."

"Call me Jules."

"It's the prettiest one, Jules. Last year I lined the kitchen walls with faience tiles. This year I put flowers around the terrace. I've even fitted up a bathroom which I don't use."

"You've done well, Mimile."

"You can't imagine. . . I'm so lonely! I have to make my own diversions."

"Your garden has the best peach trees on the island."

"Yet I don't like peaches!. . . You remember, Jules? The guy, Mr. Michel? Well, no matter what I do, I can't forget. I still feel his limp body in the sack."

"That was so long ago, Mimile."

"Well . . . and then, you see, there's you. There's you who I knew was breaking stones, out there on the road."

"That did my lungs good. I had weak lungs, you know. The doctors had x-rayed me and wanted to send me to the mountains. So you see the outdoor work did me good."

Mauvoisin's smile was as cold as the bottom of the sea.

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"You don't resent me, Jules?"

"What for?"

He was so gentle, so full of magnanimity, that Boussus could not stop talking.

"I'm going to confess the truth to you, Jules. I have a beautiful house, hundreds of thousands of francs in the bank, a beautiful boat, no matter what they say. Anyway, it suits me. And yet, Jules, I've never been happy."

"Why?"

"Because of you."

"Have I ever made you any reproaches?"

"You never wrote to me."

"I could have. We have ways, through buddies. Why would I have made you any reproaches?"

"You don't know, Jules?"

"I know everything."

"Everything?"

In the face of such understanding, such kindness, the big Boussus felt like bursting into tears.

"You see, when you come back from out there it's like coming back from hell. You see things differently. You can't imagine . . ." Jules's voice diminished.

He still had the gentleness of a saint out of a stained-glass window. And all this time, for years and years, Boussus had been haunted by the image of a grim avenger.

"You remember *everything,* Jules?"

"Everything."

"It was a Saturday—"

"In November, yes. It was raining, windy. I was managing a small roadside garage about five kilometers from San Quentin. Because I couldn't make both ends meet, I had opened a tavern next door, but in spite of it I was threatened with eviction. My wife, who was pretty, had gone to visit her sick aunt in Paris, remember? I wonder now if it really was her aunt—"

"Well, Jules, since we are now like brothers, I can tell you—"

"I suspected—but it doesn't matter. Besides, afterwards she asked me for a divorce."

"I arrived at your home around six in the evening," Boussus recalled. "I lived about two hundred meters away from you and I was doing handy work in the neighborhood."

It was unheard of! Boussus would never have imagined that the

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conversation would go this way. It was as if they were in heaven, where souls can evoke their earthly concerns with the utmost serenity.

"When I came into your house, there were feet sticking out from a closet," Boussus continued.

"I'd just killed him," Jules explained.

"Beaten him with a monkey wrench."

"I used what I had at hand."

Thanks to this disembodied mood of Jules Mauvoisin, the most sordid details seemed to lose their vilest qualities.

And yet—the wet road—the garage and the tavern—this poor Michel, the cashier of the San Quentin Wire Works, who had a wooden leg and was going about on his auxiliary motor-bicycle . . . It was not only Saturday, it was the thirtieth of the month. He had gone to the bank to bring back the pay of the thousands of factory workers.

"Hi! Jules, could you see if there's any water in my carburetor?" Michel had said.

His motor-bicycle was coughing and he was afraid of a breakdown halfway up the hill.

"Why don't you go and have a drop of gin while I fix it, Mr. Michel?"

Mauvoisin knew there were hundreds of thousands of francs, in bills, in the toolbox. Boussus had not yet arrived.

Boussus didn't actually see the tragedy—the blow with the monkey wrench on the cashier's head, the further blows, the gesture of pushing the inert body into a closet . . .

With as much serenity as his visitor, Boussus was now saying, "I saw the feet showing and you told me, 'If you help me get rid of the body, it'll be fifty-fifty between us.' "

"We were young then," Jules said softly.

"We took the light truck and went over to the canal, after tying the body in a coal sack. It was limp. I could never forget that limp bundle."

"We were young then."

"Since then, each day while I fish with boulters, or spade my garden, or play cards at Maurice's, I—"

"It only shows you have not been out there."

"Maybe you don't know the whole story, Jules."

"Out there we know everything."

"Including what I did afterwards? You see, I'm a blackguard,

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Jules, a scoundrel. Worse still, nobody knows that I'm one. I was waiting to tell you . . . your wife . . ."

"Fernande?"

"Well, yes. You see, even before—"

"It matters so little."

"I still wonder why she preferred me to you. I surely wasn't handsome."

"Neither was I."

"I wasn't rich."

"I wasn't either. Maybe she just wanted a change."

"But afterwards, when you were arrested—"

"It doesn't matter any more."

"I swear it does, Jules! I acted like a swine, like a—I don't know what. We had shared the seven hundred thousand francs from the toolbox—"

"That was only fair."

"Not quite, since you killed Michel all by yourself. I only helped you put him in the sack."

"It's the same thing."

"Except that, eight days later, when the cops began to look hard at you—"

"I brought you my share and asked you to keep it for me during the inquiry."

"That's when I began to be a real bad one, Jules. I had the seven hundred thousand francs. I wanted to keep Fernande for myself alone. I wrote the anonymous letter—it must have occurred to you that I was the one who had written it."

"Yes."

"And you didn't mind?"

"It's all so long ago."

"Just the same, it was I who wrote the Commissioner that you killed Michel with blows from a monkey wrench, that the towel you used to clean your hands with was buried in your garden, near a well, and that the wooden toolbox was burned in your garage where they found the ashes. I'm a blackguard, Jules, but I swear to you that since then I've not been any happier than you. Fernande walked out on me. They say she died two years ago in a hospital."

"Good for her!"

"And myself . . . I live, of course. I get up in the morning, I go fishing, I eat bouillabaisse, I play cards, but all day and all night

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I'm thinking: 'This poor Jules, all that time out there."

Is a prison really capable of changing a man that much? Jules was falling, if not into a trap, at any rate into acquiescence. He was nodding.

"You're a chum," he asserted.

"I'm a bad one, Jules."

"Bah! You see, I came only to say a short hello. But I'll come back from time to time."

"Where are you living? You're not afraid they'll take you back?"

Jules pointed vaguely to the coast mountains and said, "Over there."

With this turn in the conversation, Boussus found himself thinking of a hammer he kept in the mirrored armoire for breaking the hard shells of the hermit crabs. If the flat boat came nearer—

"It's all so long ago," Jules Mauvoisin was repeating philosophically.

He was gentle. So gentle that—

Having for years read the newspapers in fear of learning that Mauvoisin, the convict, had escaped, having for months checked all strangers who landed at Porquerolles, having for so long—

And now it was so simple, so pleasant, so easy!

They say that our dreams, even the longest ones, last only a few seconds.

Is the following, perhaps, a proof?

Boussus opened his eyes and was amazed to find no flat boat around—nothing on the water as far as he could see, except a large, gray, light cruiser anchored in the bay of the Salines.

The bottle of Porquerolles wine was almost empty. The can that had contained anchovies in piquant sauce was covered with flies. The cheese was gone. The last chunk of bread was drying in the sun.

Now, for the first time, Boussus' face fell, as when he was worried about his liver, and his eyes had the look of marbles that have rolled in the wet.

Could it not have been a dream? Or was it true? That Jules had really returned in this—how to say it—this unearthly frame of mind?

Boussus pulled a large red handkerchief from his pocket to clean his blurred sunglasses.

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He wondered.

But no! There was no one. No boat. No *bette!*

He leaned over to look back at the Mèdes rock and was about to feel reassured.

It was, however, the right date. He had figured it out. Starting with the day of Jules Mauvoisin's escape, he had had time, allowing for difficulties, to take a boat to France, to go to the north, and from there to track down Boussus and reach Porquerolles.

He had figured this for so many years! Over and over again!

All the rest was true—the feet sticking out from the closet, the limp body in the sack, the light truck, the canal.

And, above all, the anonymous letter!

Why had Boussus behaved that way? Frankly, he was beginning to have doubts about it now. Was it to have Fernande only for himself? Or to avoid sharing the 700,000 francs?

He had been living ever since in anguish, in fear. Could it be that out there *they were that well guarded?*

He fished, he fitted out his boat and his house. He played cards. Each time anyone, in the eucalyptus shade of the square, called out to him, "Hi, Boussus," he thought he recognized Jules's voice.

He half stood up to draw in one of the boulter lines that he had not payed out in his sleep.

"Mimile!"

The voice was not coming from the sea, but from the land, from the Mèdes headland that was only a bare rock in the sun.

"It's your turn now, Mimile, you son of a—"

That was all. He heard a shot. He toppled over. His body felt both cool and warm and for an instant, coming nearer, he saw the bluish sea floor where the girellas were swimming . . .

"I always said his mirrored armoire would end like that!" declared Grimaud, while they were raising the boat, keel-up.

"He must have become dizzy—staring at the sea."

A fisher of sea urchins found the body at mid-depth.

It was not until evening that the doctor found a small round hole in Boussus' temple.

"This man has been killed by a bullet from a revolver."

There was an inquiry by the police from Hyères and Toulon. It was learned that a stranger had disembarked from the *Cormorant*—a nasty-looking stranger with a squint, the ship's captain asserted. The stranger set out again by boat in three hours

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and seemed to be laughing to himself.

He had been seen passing the Notre Dame farm.

He had, in fact, asked a boy where Mr. Boussus lived.

"He's fishing," the answer had been.

"Where?"

"At his place."

"And where is his place?"

"Near Mèdes point—right at the foot of the rock. You'll recognize his boat for sure. They call it *The Mirrored Armoire.*"

The squint-eyed stranger had recognized it.

That matters little. What is important is that, from the shore, he must have shouted to Boussus in his sleep: "Mimile!"

And did that "Mimile" reach the fisherman at the bottom of his sleep and release a dream that lasted a few seconds, perhaps only a few tenths of a second?

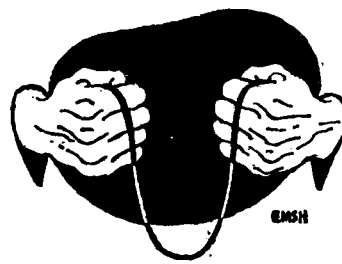
When the eyes of the sleeper opened, still full of the vision of a Jules all sugar and honey who evoked the past without rancor, he found before him a man who hurled at him, bursting with the bitterness of 25 years of Guyana:

"It's your turn now, Mimile, you son of a—"

A small sharp report in the calm of a Mediterranean morning, a fat body toppling over. The girellas, the hogfish, the sérans, the hermit crabs, and all the gear of abandoned fishing . . .

The *Royal Girella* had sunk like a stone and turned over.

So much the worse, if anyone tells you differently at Maurice's.



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*A detective-crime story in the style of* ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND? *With the creator of Alice as the Chief of Police? No sooner wished for (years ago) than here for your chuckling pleasure. And in the spirit of Lewis Carroll (with a hint of Baum and Oz), the story contains, as the author wrote us, "the most diabolical puns which even Schlock Homes would shudder at."*

*And again quoting the author, "Anyway, it's something different!" And that it is . . .*

# MALICE IN BLUNDERLAND

## by KEVIN GOLDSTEIN-JACKSON

Little Elica was beginning to get bored. She was named Elica because her parents had wanted a boy named Eric. When their only child turned out to be female, they took her to their local church to be christened Erica, but the clergyman was Japanese and couldn't pronounce the letter "r"—hence her present name Elica.

The fact that Elica is, as you have probably noticed, an anagram of Alice, is irrelevant but intentional.

Anyway, the reason why five-year-old Elica was bored was because she had tried to turn on a TV set, but nothing had happened. And what, thought Elica, is the use of a television set without pictures or conversations?

Soon she began to feel drowsy—until a rather fat kangaroo came bounding past her, puffing, "The weight of this skin is killing me." Then this kangaroo took out a handkerchief from its pouch and dabbed at its eyes.

There was nothing really surprising in this—after all, little Elica Higginbottom *was* in a television studio waiting for her cue to take part in a new children's TV series.

Being bored, however, Elica decided to follow the kangaroo, as she had just observed it waddle out of the studio.

"Perhaps it went to its dressing room," she murmured, entering the passageway that led to the actors' rest area. And as a man

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wearing only a barrel rushed past her, she wondered which of the many doors might lead to the kangaroo.

Elica opened the first door and saw a giant caterpillar puffing away at a peculiar-smelling cigarette.

"Hi, man!" called the caterpillar.

"I'm not a man, I'm a little girl," replied Elica.

"Crazy, man. Hey, want a puff of this?"

"No, thanks," said Elica hastily, and continued her walk along the corridor.

From behind various doors she could hear snatches of conversation: "You know, she's so cross-eyed that when she cries the tears run down her back." "Nature is really amazing. I mean, look where Nature placed our ears—just in the right place for the inventor of spectacles." "She sure had early American features—she looked like a buffalo." "I went out with a spiritualist last night—I wanted to try a new medium."

As she continued down the corridor she passed several more animals.

"Hello, little girl," said a lady mouse. "If a buttercup is yellow, what color is a hiccup?"

"I don't know," confessed Elica.

"Burple!" said the mouse, giggling uncontrollably. "And do you know the difference between unlawful and illegal?"

Elica shook her head, so the mouse explained, "Unlawful is against the law, illegal is a sick bird."

Elica left the giggling mouse and pushed open a large door. She found herself in one of the property storerooms. It seemed deserted, but as soon as Elica entered, someone closed the door behind her, and she could hear the key turning in the lock.

"Oh, dear!" said Elica. "I hope I'm not trapped and have to stay here all night."

Elica rattled the doorknob, but no one came to help her.

She slumped down by the door and sighed. "Oh, how I wish I were small enough to crawl through the keyhole—or perhaps be a champion limbo dancer so I could limbo under the crack at the bottom of the door."

She sat for a few minutes, then decided to explore the room.

Elica examined the shelves and found several bottles marked POISON, but she knew they were only fake bottles made out of wax so they would break easily when an actor was hit over the head with them.

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One bottle, however, was *not* marked POISON, nor was it made of wax. In fact, it contained a browny-colored liquid.

Elica sipped from the bottle. The liquid was very nice—a flavor she had never tasted before.

She drank deeply from the bottle, and very soon she felt her head going fuzzy, and her body didn't do what she told it to do.

"Curiousher and curiousher," said Elica, much surprised that her words came out with a slurring sound.

Had she but known she'd been drinking beer, she would not have been so surprised when her legs decided they were incapable of supporting her and made her fall to the ground. Her head seemed to be spinning round and round. It was then that the bottle slipped from her hand and, as she groped for it, trying to find the container of wonderful brown liquid, her hand brushed against something soft and wet.

She turned and tried to focus her eyes on what she had just touched.

It was the kangaroo. It was lying on the floor beneath a large table, and its skin where Elica had touched it was wet with blood. The kangaroo was dead.

Elica began to cry, and although she tried to tell herself that big girls of five don't cry, the tears streamed from her eyes until she passed into a soothing, calming sleep.

When Elica awoke—about two hours, twenty-three minutes, and sixteen seconds later (give or take a second)—she saw a duck peering at her through the open door of the storeroom.

"Oh!" said Elica. "My head hurts terribly." As she focused her eyes she asked, "Who are you?"

But the duck did not answer. "Perhaps it's a foreign duck," murmured Elica. "Maybe it's from Bombay."

Then the duck saw the body of the kangaroo, uttered a shrill scream, and ran off to call the police.

Half an hour later (give or take two hours, twenty-three minutes, and sixteen seconds), all the animal actors and actresses—plus Elica and the man dressed only in the barrel—were assembled in the storeroom being questioned by Chief of Police, Carroll Lewis.

"Now," he said. "We know Keith the kangaroo was killed at two o'clock this afternoon." He paused, then turned and pointed a finger at a grinning gorgonzola cat. "Where were *you* at that time?"

"I was sitting in a tub of steaming poultices, strangling goldfish," replied the cat.

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"Have you got a goldfish-strangling license?" demanded Carroll.

"No."

"That's all right. You don't need one. Trick question. Can anyone confirm your alibi?"

"The goldfish."

"Good. Now, does anyone want to confess? It must have been *one* of you who did it."

"But how can you say that?" protested the duck. "You've only just arrived here and haven't even had time to examine the body properly. Look at all those bruises down the front of his neck—"

"Yes, his alimentary, my dear Watson. I *did* notice that. At first I thought he might have done it himself while trying to remove a chicken bone from his throat, so I immediately suspected fowl play. Then—"

The Chief of Police moved toward a grand piano in the corner of the storeroom.

"—I discovered *this*."

He held up a dead fish which he had extracted from the instrument.

"Oh, that's all right," said the animals in unison, "that's only the piano tuna."

"It still sounds fishy to me," commented Carroll.

"I don't see why," said a large porcupine. "I've just found this box of vestas with your name on it."

He handed the box to Carroll who glanced at it and said, "Yes, at last I have met my match. But *I* didn't kill the kangaroo. I'm the Chief of Police and have only just arrived. Someone else must have dropped this box."

"Talking of fish," commented an African wildebeest, "it reminds me of the song called *Whale Meat Again*. Or even *If You Were the Only Gill in the World*."

"Oh, my cod!" exclaimed Carroll. "Speak up, I'm hard of herring—or shall I sing *Salmon Chanted Evening?*"

"I'd prefer *Mackerel the Knife*—no relation to Jack the Kipper," replied the wildebeest. "But I'll just mull over the matter or ask minnow, minnow on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"

"Eel have to go," said Carroll. "You might be having a whale of a time, but it serves no useful porpoise, so shut up or I'll give you an electric shark."

"But *who* killed the kangaroo?" asked Elica, trying to bring the conversation back to abnormality.

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"It's obvious when you think about it," said Carroll. "Everyone here is dressed as an animal except you and that man wearing only the barrel. Now, if the kangaroo had been killed by an animal, surely the victim would have ripped the animal's costume in his death struggle—yet no one here has a torn costume, and there are no costume fibers under the fingernails—paws—of the kangaroo. This means that either you, little girl, or the man in the barrel committed the murder."

The animals gasped.

Carroll continued, "Now, a barrel is also known as a butt, so a person wearing a barrel must be known as a butt-ler. It follows logically from this that the butt-ler did it."

The man in the barrel, whose name was Diogenes Dingbat, broke down and confessed to murdering the kangaroo. It turned out that the kangaroo had been blackmailing Dingbat about his forthcoming marriage to an actress named Edith, who was playing the part of the mouse. The marriage would be bigamouse since Dingbat was already married to an actress named Kate, from whom he could not get a divorce and, as the man in the barrel wryly said, "You can't have your Kate and Edith."

Thus, as the Chief of Police led the murderer away to face a midget judge (a small thing sent to try us), Elica pictured to herself how she would tell this tale to her children when she was old; and how they would tell it to their children . . .

## DETECTIVERSE

### *HELL IS PAVED*

*by MARJORIE Q. BOYLE*

My friend's intentions were of the best,
But I gnashed my teeth with rage
When she lent me an E.Q. mystery
That was missing the very last page!

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

## CRIME DOSSIER

**by OTTO PENZLER**

From the beginning, detective and mystery fiction have enjoyed a close and happy relationship with horror, fantasy, and science fiction. Gothic novels have their elements of terror explained by either natural or supernatural means, and Edgar Allan Poe often walked the fine line between mystery stories and macabre tales.

Some of the most famous characters in mystery fiction possess idiosyncrasies that give them every appearance of fantastic creations. Dr. Fu Manchu, Harley Quin, The Shadow, and, of course, Count Dracula are among those bizarre personalities whose adventures are enjoyed by devotees of both genres—fantasy and mystery fiction.

Some recent books designed primarily for horror and fantasy lovers also should be of considerable interest to mystery aficionados. You can always count on Dracula to be despicable and there are ample catalysts for shudders in *The Annotated Dracula* (Ballantine, $5.95), a large paper reprint of the more expensive cloth edition of Clarkson Potter. Leonard Wolf provides an introduction, notes, and a bibliography; illustrations by Satty and others abound. Appropriately, it is dedicated to Bela Lugosi.

In addition to the predictable motion picture stills of various actors portraying Dracula, Kurt Brokaw's *A Night in Transylvania* (Grosset & Dunlap, $12.95 cloth, $5.95 paper) contains many fine photographs of the region with which the grim legend is associated—a travel guide for the courageous.

Because of the popularity of countless film versions its creator is often forgotten. Daniel Farson attempts to correct this oversight with *The Man Who Wrote Dracula: A Biography of Bram Stoker* (St. Martin's, $8.95). The author is uniquely qualified to write about the neglected Stoker; he is his great-nephew.

Dracula is also present in *Horrors from Screen to Scream* (Avon, $4.95), a large paperback guide to major horror and fantasy films. Mainly a picture book, it covers



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the films superficially, but Ed Naha displays a rare wit in his descriptions that may offend fans of, say, *Night of the Living Dead,* but is bound to amuse them as well.

Also covered in this book, of course, is King Kong, the product of the fertile imagination of one of history's greatest and most prolific thriller writers, Edgar Wallace. With a new film released recently, several books have come on the market, the most fun being *The Making of King Kong* (Ballantine, $3.95) by Orville Goldner and George E. Turner, and *The Girl in the Hairy Paw* (Avon, $5.95), edited by Ronald Gottesman and Harry Gould. There isn't much to choose between them, though the Avon book has first-person articles by Fay Wray and others associated with the production. Either is a great treat and should be read with a bag of popcorn. Also just issued on the same subject are *The Creation of Dino De Laurentii's King Kong* (Pocket Books, $1.75) and *King Kong* (Ace, $1.95; Tempo, 95¢), the novelization by Delos W. Lovelace.

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# BLOODY VISIONS

**by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

The place is Monticello, a medium-sized Midwestern city (modeled somewhat after Cincinnati, home perhaps not surprisingly of the giant Procter and Gamble soap industry that nurtures so much daytime drama). The city has more than its share of criminal infiltration, and is the setting for the longest continuous mystery program on television, *The Edge of Night,* seen every weekday afternoon on ABC-TV.

Daytime series have long traded on mayhem and melodrama, but *Edge,* since its debut on CBS more than 20 years ago (4/2/56), has consistently deliberately dealt with themes of mystery and crime. Its writer, Henry Slesar, won an Edgar for his first novel, *The Gray Flannel Shroud,* and has contributed stories to *EQMM* in an active career in our field. The time structure of the daytime serial appeals to Slesar because it allows him to construct complex, many-layered suspense dramas.

*Edge*'s stories essentially involve 2 criminal attorneys, their families and friends, and Monticello's police chief. Recent high points have included the murderous maneuverings of a politically ambitious family, some sharp courtroom sequences, a mob assassination attempt, and the intricate reasons behind the "lost" months during which a young wife had been thought drowned. Its addictive but well written melodramatics and unending mystery-



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novel format have won *Edge* an Emmy award and some staunch friends, among them P. G. Wodehouse, who, when asked why he never missed an episode, explained: "I like a crackling good *mystery!*"

May TV always be supportive of that taste—daytime and any time.

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# THE JURY BOX

**by JON L. BREEN**

Recently several of fiction's greatest detectives—Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Nero Wolfe—have been featured in their last cases. Swedish policeman Martin Beck joins their number in Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's *The Terrorists* (Pantheon, $7.95), translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate.

The final Beck tale is a triumph, an excellent crime novel that may figure in Edgar consideration. The central plot deals with the security measures to protect a visiting American senator, an assignment which Beck and his colleagues approach with a memorable stroke of ingenuity. The most notable features of the novel, though, are the characterizations of the cops and lawyers and their clients (*not* of the senator, who is a non-speaking part and a cartoon) and the critique of Swedish society, only occasionally too preachy. (****)

**** Hans Hellmut Kirst: *The Nights of the Long Knives,* Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, $8.95. Translated from the German by J. Maxwell Brownjohn. The present-day murder of an ex-Nazi in Lugano, Switzerland, serves mainly as a framing device for the horrifying story of a hand-picked SS group in the early 1930's. Kirst, famed author of *The Night of the Generals,* continues to be a powerful and unrelenting explorer of Germany's recent history.

*** R. B. Dominic: *Murder Out of Commission,* Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95. The controversy over nuclear power plants figures in the latest case of Ohio Congressman Ben Safford. A standard whodunit with satiric sidelights by one of the most reliable writers in the genre, in very good form here. (Dominic is better known as Emma Lathen.)

*** Russell H. Greenan: *The Bric-a-Brac Man,* Random House, $7.95. The author specializes in amoral central characters—here shady antique dealer Arnold Hopkins, whose involved tale (accurately called an extravaganza) combines elements of Faust, Raffles, and a darker-visioned Donald Westlake. (An even more memorable anti-hero is the hypocritical clergyman of Greenan's last novel, *Heart of Gold.*)

*** Pamela Bennetts: *Death of*



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*the Red King,* St. Martin's, $7.95. Fictional speculation on an unsolved historical mystery — the death of William Rufus, son of William the Conqueror. A highly readable blend of mystery and occult elements.

*** Jeffrey Ashford: *Slow Down the World,* Walker, $6.95. An ex-auto racer turns getaway car driver, then reforms with much difficulty. Expert, fast reading thriller by a practiced hand.

*** June Drummond: *Slowly the Poison,* Walker, $6.95. A historical mystery, set in London and South Africa in 1911, not to be missed if you long for the days when any respectable detective novel featured a lengthy inquest.

*** Hugh Pentecost: *Die After Dark,* Dodd, Mead, $6.95. Another tough case for public relations man Julian Quist, whose client's impending U.S. Senate campaign is threatened by a sex-and-murder scandal. Pentecost, whose first detective story appeared over fifty years ago, continues to be a prolific and reliable craftsman.

** Clark Howard: *The Hunters,* Dial Press, $7.95. Four unhappy suburbanites on a hunting trip and a murdered vice-squad cop. What is the connection? Howard is such a good story teller that unsubtle characterization, pedestrian style, and overdone Freudian motivation won't stop you turning the pages.

** Helen McCloy: *The Changeling Conspiracy,* Dodd, Mead, $6.95. The Patty Hearst case inspired this latest by another writer who knows how to tell a story and always has interesting side observations. Ultimately, though, a disappointment, especially from the creator of the brilliant psychiatrist-sleuth Basil Willing, who surely is due for a comeback.

Among the recent reprints:

Dorothy Uhnak's *The Bait* (Pocket Books, $1.75), the brilliant co-winner of the 1968 Edgar for best first mystery, introduces policewoman Christie Opara, whose three cases to date form an outstanding police-procedural series. From a much longer series comes Ed McBain's *Like Love* (Signet, $1.25), an early (1962) 87th Precinct case, offering the same compulsive readability and a bit more freshness and vitality than recent additions to the series.

We have the Sherlock Holmes craze to thank for the first U.S. hardcover edition of Gladys Mitchell's 1957 novel *Watson's Choice* (McKay, $6.95), in which Dame Beatrice Bradley encounters murder at a Sherlock Holmes costume party. Perhaps the reception of this charming book will precipitate American editions of some of Dame Beatrice's other cases, which the prolific author has been recording since 1929.

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# REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

**THE WIZARD OF DEATH, by Richard Forrest. The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., $8.95**

Second in the series featuring the engaging Wentworths. Lyon is a writer of juveniles; his wife, Beatrice, is a Connecticut state senator. At a political rally, Bea, introducing Randolph Llewyn, the gubernatorial nominee, turns to shake hands with him. Two shots ring out, killing Llewyn. Police Chief Rocco enlists Lyon's help in finding the assassin when he shows him photos that show that the second bullet was meant for Bea. A bizarre political thriller by the author of *A Child's Garden of Death.*

"An absorbing book, and a compassionate one." —*The New York Times*

**WATSON'S CHOICE, by Gladys Mitchell. McKay-Washburn, $6.95**

The rich, eccentric Sir Bohun Chantrey is an admirer of Sherlock Holmes, and to celebrate that immortal detective's anniversary he arranges a costume dinner at which the guests are invited to impersonate characters from the Baker Street canon. Lucky that the redoubtable and shrewd Mrs. Beatrice Bradley is on hand, ready to tangle with a false Professor Moriarty, an impenetrable pea-souper, and a stray "Hound of the Baskervilles."

Gladys Mitchell, one of the last great writers of the Golden Age, was awarded a Silver Dagger from the Crime Writers Association of Great Britain in 1976.

Says P. D. James: She is "sharp, elegant, and witty."

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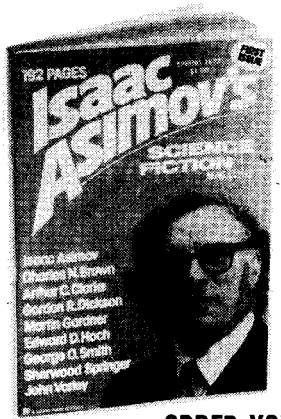


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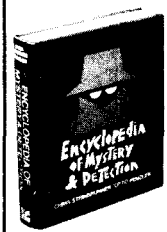


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**a *NEW* police procedural by LAWRENCE TREAT**

*Mitch Taylor of the Homicide Squad could always use overtime pay. But overtime usually meant an emergency, and when the emergency meant being shot at — well, Mitch could skip it and get along without the extra cash.*

*A true police procedural is not a one-man investigation (at least, that was Anthony Boucher's opinion). It's a cooperative effort, every man on the squad and every man on the technical force pitching in. In this case the whole department collaborated to find Mitch's assailant. It was so collective an effort that even Mitch's son Joey and wife Amy got into the act . . .*

# T AS IN TERROR

## *by* LAWRENCE TREAT

One of the things about Mitch Taylor of Homicide was that he remembered stuff. Usually. Like he said to Balenky, it was the same as hammering a nail in your head; once it got in, it stayed. So maybe he should have remembered the details and put two and two together, except he didn't. But for that matter, neither did Lieutenant Decker.

What the lieutenant said that morning in the squad room was, "Remember Joe Purdue? Homicide. Killed a girl, and we never found out what he had against her."

"He claimed these fits came over him," Balenky said, "like a Charley horse, and then he had to go out and kill. One of the phoniest insanity pleas I ever heard of."

"He has a different story now," Lieutenant Decker said, "and it's a real cutie. He claims he planted incriminating evidence on some upstate senator about five years ago, which cost the senator the election. Joe now states that his testimony was pure fabrication, and that actually he was paid ten grand by C. P. Reed to frame the senator who was investigating Reed.

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"Reed owns a construction company that specializes in building fire traps, shaky foundations, and other dangers to human safety. Joe thinks his confession will make him a decent member of society, in the opinion of the parole board. The D.A. says the story, if true, constitutes a cause of action against Reed, but Joe's statement needs corroboration.

"According to Joe, he and his ten grand went to Eppy's Bar and Grill, where he met a girl named Patsy. After suitable terms had been arranged, they went to a motel. Sometime during the night, however, she slugged him, appropriated his ten grand, and disappeared. He now claims that in his anger and confusion over the loss, he went out and mistakenly beat up the wrong girl. He regrets the error. All he can remember about Patsy now is that she was a brunette, had a voice like a bell, and a bottom like a spinnaker. The D.A. would like us to find her. Any ideas?"

Nobody had anything to say that was exactly brilliant, so it boiled down to starting at Eppy's and asking run-of-the-mill questions. What was Patsy's last name? Who knew her, where did she hang out, and with whom? When had anybody last seen her? Had she ever mentioned family, boy friends, girl friends? Any idea what school she'd gone to, what jobs she'd held?

Stuff like that. Slow routine work. You went at it when there was nothing else in particular to do. Some days all eight members of the Homicide Squad were on it, some days just one or two of them. They were in low gear and getting nowhere, except that when you keep slogging along, then sometimes, all of a sudden and when you least expect it, somebody says sure, they know Patsy, saw her a couple of days ago, want her address?

You don't get paid overtime for that kind of work—you do it nine to five and then go home and rest. Overtime pay is for emergencies and while Mitch could have used some extra cash right now, he was willing to skip the emergencies. Especially because this particular emergency was when somebody took a shot at him.

They did it on Williams Street, the lower end, which hits the river at an old beat-up wharf. You don't go there at night, not alone, anyhow, but it's okay in the daytime. Mitch had been on a lead that turned out to be nothing, and he was standing next to his car and unlocking it when he heard the bullet smash through his windshield.

He ducked fast, because when they take a shot and miss,

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chances are they'll try another one. Only they didn't. So after enough seconds had gone by, Mitch stood up and looked around.

The hole in the windshield was on the small side—probably a .22 made it—and it looked like it had come from one of the shacks alongside the wharf. One of the shacks had a sign that looked like it said Stapleton & Co., only a couple of the letters were missing.

Mitch wasn't foolish enough to go chasing after the guy. Instead, he stood where he was, turned his key in the lock, and climbed into the car, where he called the dispatcher. Mitch reported what had happened and where he was. He was kind of shook up, so he waited a couple of minutes before getting down to the business of tracing the slug.

He could see where it had gone through the windshield, and then up the upholstery of the front seat, just where he'd have been sitting. Which was funny. On account why would anybody shoot the car, when Mitch was standing there and they could have got Mitch instead? So either somebody had a pretty bad aim, which you didn't want to bet on, or else the idea was to scare Mitch off. But from what?

And with a .22. You don't use a .22 to kill anybody, except from close up, but from a distance you can be a lot more accurate with a larger caliber. Which meant what?

He couldn't make any good guesses, so he tried to remember what he'd done back over the last hour or two, in case he'd triggered something off somewheres. But he drew a blank. With that he leaned back in his seat and settled down kind of low, just in case. He didn't exactly fall asleep. What he did was one of the things he was good at—he thought of Amy and blocked out everything else, until the lieutenant and three of the homicide boys showed up.

Mitch told them what had happened, and they went to work, which was checking the wharf and the shacks, and firing questions at anybody they could get hold of. Mitch was pretty sure they wouldn't find out anything, and they didn't, but at least it showed that the police were swinging away and hellbent for a K.O.

He got home early that night, and Amy rushed to the door as soon as she heard his key in the lock. "Mitchell," she said, sort of out of breath, "somebody phoned and said they were going to get even with you. They said I'd better say goodbye to you because I might not see you again."

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"No kidding?" Mitch said. "Look, Amy, if they were going to do anything, they wouldn't phone and tell you about it, would they?"

"But they did."

"Makes no sense," Mitch said. "Look, Amy, some guy went and took a shot at me this afternoon, so some crank must have heard about it and called you. Just making trouble, that's all. So forget about it, before the kids start catching on that something might be wrong."

"Of course," she said. "You're right." But he could tell she was upset, and some of it got under his skin too.

He wished Amy could have sat in on the briefing the next morning. She would have felt better, because the lieutenant made it pretty clear that nobody could take a shot at one of his squad and get away with it. So Mitch was the Number One business of the day. They figured somebody had to have a pretty good idea of who fired that gun and why, and their job was to run that person down.

As for Mitch, he spent most of the day in the Records Room and then on the phone, digging up some of his old cases and checking out who had a grudge against him, or whether anybody he'd sent away had just come out of the slammer and wanted revenge. And he came up with four maybe names, four guys who'd taken it personal.

The lieutenant handed the names over to the Homicide Squad. Check them, check their families and their wives and their girl friends. Find out where they were yesterday. So, in a way, it was a pretty good day for Mitch. On the other hand, in a way it wasn't.

He went home on his regular bus and stood there alongside the driver, pretty much like always. The bus driver knew most everything about Mitch except his name, and the guy brought up the business about somebody taking a shot at some detective. The driver had read about it in the afternoon paper.

"I wouldn't want to be in his shoes," the driver said.

Mitch took the remark in stride. "Yeah," he said. "Neither would I."

On the whole, he figured the business would blow over. No sweat, no tears, no nothing. One of these days he'd sit around and wonder about that shot, but the chances were he'd never find out. It had happened, and it would get over and done with, like a bellyache. Except that Amy was involved, which made the whole

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thing a little more serious.

She met him at the door, same as last night. "He called again," she said. "He said Joey and Mamie—they weren't safe."

Mitch held her real close. "Amy," he said, "somebody's trying to scare you, that's all. I don't know why, not yet anyway. But if they were going to do something to Mamie, they wouldn't tell you about it first, would they?"

"That's what you said last night, about me. But he called again, didn't he?"

"Look," Mitch said. "You're scared. That's the whole idea of it, isn't it? Okay. I'm scared, too, so I'll figure out a way of handling this. And believe me, the lieutenant and all the fellas are working on it. So what's for dinner?"

"Stew."

"Sounds fine," Mitch said. "Mind if I have a beer first?"

Only he had three. Which goes to show he wasn't exactly calm.

The guy called again that night, around three A.M. Mitch answered, figuring it was the dispatcher telling him to get dressed, there was a homicide somewheres. Only this was Amy's guy and he had a speech all set up.

"Taylor," he said, "I'm going to get even. Not you, that's too easy. Your wife or your kids. I haven't decided yet. Which do you want to lose first?"

Mitch hung up, and Amy said, "What was that? Who was it?"

"Wrong number," Mitch said. "At three in the morning people get mixed up." And he went back to bed. It took him quite a while to get back to sleep, but he figured he'd made progress because he'd heard that voice and he'd recognize it anywhere, any time. So he had a clue.

At the briefing the next morning Mitch reported the phone call and Decker and the squad chewed over the possibilities, and it came down to two things. Either this was somebody Mitch had put away and was out for revenge, in which case they were bound to run him down eventually. Or else this was some kind of crank—maybe Mitch had once stepped on his toe or given him a dirty look. In which case how could you locate him, until he did something more than make phone calls which were probably from a pay booth, anyway?

None of it sounded too good to Mitch, so he went over to see the captain of the precinct where Mitch lived. Mitch let the captain in on what was happening and the captain said sure, he'd watch out

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for the kids. Which was like saying, if somebody pulled a holdup in the precinct he'd do something about it.

After that Mitch went and looked up George Madden, who patrolled the area. George said you could count on him, he'd keep an eye on the kids, and without letting on. He knew them and knew what time they went to school and when they got out, only you could never be sure about Joey. He hung around the playground and you didn't know when he'd decide to leave. But George said he'd do his best, and he'd tip off a couple of the plainclothes boys who patrolled in an unmarked car. They'd stick around school and make sure nothing would happen.

With that, Mitch figured his kids were safe, only it turned out it wasn't that easy. Because around that time Mamie was playing gun moll, and she went around pretending she had a machine gun. Joey, who'd always wanted to be a cop, chased her away and wouldn't walk with her, so Mamie took to hopping into doorways and hiding. Like George Madden asked, how do you handle that?

You couldn't keep the news from the kids, either. Kids, they have a way of finding out things they're not supposed to, and Joey and Mamie caught on fast. For no reason Mitch ever found out, Joey named the caller Pinky. He'd say "Pinky's after me!" And he'd take off like a motorcycle when the light changed to green. Or maybe it was the other way round. "There's Pinky!" he'd yell, and chase out after nothing and try and nab it.

The thing, though, was that the kids loved it. Mamie gave up playing gun moll on account she now wanted to be the victim, and she told all her friends that a bunch of gangsters were after her and they'd been trying to shoot her. She and Joey pushed it for all it was worth, while the rest of the kids watched goo-goo-eyed and wished somebody would come along and try to kidnap them.

What with all that was happening and getting nowhere, the Homicide Squad was going crazy, and the lieutenant had a job keeping the story out of the papers, because it would make them look silly. So these were pretty bad days for Mitch and Amy. The phone calls kept coming, and one day Amy got a package in the mail that had a toy cop in it, all beat up and splashed with red ink, to look like blood.

It was like a siege. After a few days the phone company took all incoming calls and monitored them, but pretty soon they stopped. Mitch made Amy promise never to go out alone, only she did, and Mitch was half glad of it because it showed she was fighting back.

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A series of blank postcards started coming, and Pinky didn't even have to say "You know who" on the back of them.

The whole business was still Number One with the Homicide Squad, and it looked like it was going to stay there for a long time. Until Pinky went and threw a rock through the Taylor window a little after four o'clock in the morning.

It smashed the living-room window, and Mitch jumped up and grabbed the phone, called the dispatcher, and told him to notify whatever cars were in the neighborhood and try and close it off. Then he went back to Amy. The kids were there with her and Mamie was crying, but Joey had looked at the rock and said he knew where it came from. He said it was like the rocks somebody had piled up behind the school playground.

Mitch told him he'd make a pretty good detective, and Joey went into a shadow-boxing act to show what he'd do to Pinky when he caught him. It took a while before Mitch managed to calm him down, and then he and Amy and the kids sat around and made up stories about who was behind all this and why.

Joey was in the middle of telling how it was all a scheme to rob the Taylors of something, only he never got around to saying what it was, on account he fell asleep in the middle of it. Mamie was asleep in Amy's arms by then, so he and Amy carried the kids back to bed, and then they sat up and had some coffee. Mitch felt pretty proud, because how many families can get a rock thrown through their window and then put the kids to bed while they stayed up and had a quiet cup of coffee?

But like Mitch said, there was finally something to dig your eye-teeth into, and that morning the Homicide Squad went into high gear. They checked up on the rock, and sure enough Jub Freeman up in the lab said Joey was right. It had come from that pile behind the playground.

That gave the Homicide Squad two places to locate somebody who'd seen this guy. First there was where he'd picked up the rock, and second, where he'd heaved it through the window. And while the answer wasn't waiting for them—you couldn't expect to just happen to run into somebody who'd seen the car and the license plates and remembered them, and maybe noticed the driver, too, and could describe him, it was never that simple—still, they had a break this time. A bus driver who was on the four-to-eight shift in the morning, he was late because his alarm clock wasn't working right, and he'd been on his way to work when

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this car had come tearing by.

Mitch questioned him. "Which way was the car going?"

"Towards Hunter," the bus driver said, which is where the guy would have been heading if he'd just heaved the rock. "And going fast, maybe fifty-sixty miles an hour."

"Where were you at the time?"

"On Harte, going towards Hunter."

"Did he stop at the light?"

"No. It was red, and he went right through it. That's what made me suspicious. That's why I came to you people."

"Yeah," Mitch said, and held his breath while he asked the next one. "What kind of a car was it and what were the plates?"

"It was going too fast for me to see much," the driver answered. "All I can tell you is that it was a red car, one of the full-sized ones."

So—a big red car, and the percentage guess was it was probably stolen. That meant checking the descriptions of all cars recently reported as missing, and it turned out there were three red cars. The dispatcher put out a special order on them, giving license-plate numbers and the rest of the data that the owners had.

A rookie cop found the car that afternoon. A red Buick, stolen the evening before. He located it just off Lincoln Boulevard, in the 1500 block, and a couple of small rocks were lying on the floor next to the front passenger's seat. With that, Jub Freeman and his lab took over. By afternoon he reported that the rocks had come from behind the playground, and that the driver was a white male, with brown hair and a brown beard. Samples of dirt on the floor included bits of cement.

"Probably a mason," Jub said.

He was right, too, only the mason turned out to be the owner of the car and the rest of the dirt samples could have come from most anywhere in the city. Still, a guy with brown hair and a brown beard—had anyone noticed him in the neighborhood where the car had been stolen?

When you ask questions like that, either you find out that nobody with a beard came within miles of the district, or else everybody around was sporting a beard, and a brown one at that. So it took two days before anybody came up with anything, and Bankhart pulled it off, or thought he had.

Like usual, he was wowing every female under the age of forty, and like usual, he had a favorite at this time. She worked behind

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the perfume counter up at Knoedler's, and she couldn't walk down the street without every male giving her the eye, and then some. So she knew most of the characters who belonged on the block by sight anyhow, but this particular character was a stranger, which was one reason why she'd noticed him.

Mitch happened to be in the lieutenant's office when Bank reported. "She says he was acting suspicious," Bank said. "She says he tried a couple of car doors and they were locked, and when she came along he asked her if she wanted a ride, and when she didn't answer, he followed her and she went into the corner drug store. When she came out, he'd gone away."

"How was he dressed?" the lieutenant asked.

"Green zipper jacket, and brown and green plaid pants. Black cowboy boots. She says he was well-built, average height, and had a cocky walk to him."

"Will she come in and look over some pictures, to see if she can identify?"

Bank grinned. "She'll do anything I ask her to," he said.

Mitch wasn't there when she came in, but the squad said she looked like a million bucks, but as far as Mitch was concerned, she was a flop. Because she went through the files, put a few pictures aside, then looked at them again and said no, none of them was the guy.

That made it over a week since the thing had started. The kids were still having a ball, but Amy wasn't. While she didn't have the heebie-jeebies, she was getting there, and Mitch figured it was time to talk the whole thing over with her.

"Look," he said one evening, after the kids were in bed, "it's seven days since this started."

"Eight," she said.

"Okay. Eight, and nothing's happened. It looks like Pinky's playing a game with us."

"Just a game?" she said. "The whole Homicide Squad's concentrating on him, and it's just a game?"

"Looks that way," Mitch said. And with that, Amy got to thinking real hard.

"Mitchell," she said, "maybe he wants to divert Lieutenant Decker and the Homicide Squad from whatever they were doing, and make them look for somebody who isn't really there."

"He's there all right," Mitch said, and he kind of rubbed his chin. "Yeah, I know what you mean. We were looking for a dame

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named Patsy, she's supposed to be a witness in some fraud case, and now we're not looking for her any more. Amy, I think you got something, only what do I do now? Because the lieutenant isn't going to call off this investigation, just because you got an idea."

"What then?"

"Don't worry," Mitch said. "I'll think of something." Only he had the idea right then and there, which was to make Pinky think that Mitch was onto his game and wasn't scared any more. Then maybe Pinky would come out in the open and do something stupid, like taking another shot at Mitch to scare him all over again. And if Pinky did, Mitch was going right after him. None of this waiting around any more. The trick, though, was to get the message to Pinky.

The first thing Mitch did the next morning was to go into the lieutenant's little cubbyhole of an office and sit down on the only chair that wasn't stacked up with magazines and papers and stuff.

"Boss," he said, "we got a phone call last night. Somebody called me and said the heat was too much for Pinky, he'd left town."

"Who's Pinky?"

"The guy that's been bothering us," Mitch said. "We call him Pinky."

"You think he left town?"

"Right," Mitch said, "so there's not much sense looking for him any more, is there?"

"Brother!" the lieutenant said. "I don't know what you're trying to pull, but you're a lousy liar."

Mitch scratched his chin. "Nothing's happened for a couple of days, that's all. Even Amy's back to her old self. Still, I'd like to kind of look around and see what's what. If Pinky is still in town, maybe I can smoke him out."

The lieutenant swung around in his swivel chair and let it squeak, but he didn't say anything. After a while Mitch got up and went out. He figured he was on his own, and it was okay with the lieutenant.

Mitch spent the day going around to bars and getting in touch with his stoolies, and passing out the word that the pressure was off, that Pinky (except Mitch didn't call him that) couldn't scare him any more and the Homicide Squad wasn't even bothering with him. The idea was, if Amy'd been right, he'd have to come out of his hole and show himself.

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Mitch ended the day on Williams Street, near where the whole business had started. He parked his car where it had been the first time, and he got out and walked across the next lot. He made like nothing was bothering him and nothing could. And like he thought it might happen, somebody took a shot at him from the wharf. And missed.

This time Mitch didn't scare. He went hell bent in the direction of those wharf shacks, and when the second shot was fired, he just kept going, like he was carrying the ball and heading straight for the goal line and nothing could stop him. And nothing did, not even the flimsy door of a leanto that was partly open. He went hurtling through it, and in the half darkness of the windowless room he spotted Pinky crouched and pointing a gun.

The gun didn't bother Mitch. He was too far gone. Pinky could have shot him six times and Mitch would have kept right on going until he got his hands on the guy. It was all a blur to Mitch. He was yelling something, he didn't know what, but all of a sudden everything came together.

He was out to make up for what Pinky had done to Amy and the kids. He wasn't playing it safe, he didn't need or want any help, he was going to get a hold of this Pinky and tear him apart with his bare hands. He was going to choke him and maul him and beat him up.

Mitch went berserk and never did know exactly what happened. Maybe Pinky's gun jammed, maybe he got so scared he was paralyzed and couldn't squeeze the trigger. It didn't matter. The thing was, Mitch went clean out of his head, and when he was himself again, he was manhandling a suspect and the guy was screaming at Mitch to stop, the guy was saying yes, he'd done it, he'd do whatever Mitch said, but lay off.

With that Mitch let up. He was sitting on top of Pinky and pounding away. Pinky had just confessed the whole business, and the voice was the one that had awakened Mitch on the phone a week ago. Pinky, who said his name was Frank Norwich.

After that Mitch put the bracelets on him, brought him back to the car, and chained him to the steering post, while Mitch called the dispatcher.

Sitting there with Pinky, Mitch went to work getting the facts.

"What was the idea?" he said. "What were you trying to pull?"

Pinky wasn't in the best condition to answer. He was sort of grinding his words out through one side of his mouth, but he

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managed to explain. "Nothing personal," he said. "We picked your name out of a hat."

"Who's we?"

"Reed. Me and him. The idea was to keep you guys so busy you wouldn't have time to look for Patsy West. Without Patsy there's no real case against Reed. Nobody was going to believe Purdue unless Patsy showed and backed up his story. By tomorrow you couldn't have touched Reed."

"Statute of limitations?" Mitch said. He remembered the Reed case now, how Reed had managed to stall things off and after a while the whole business had been dropped. Five years ago. Even the date came back to Mitch.

"Statute of limitations?" Mitch said. "You mean it runs out tomorrow?" And Pinky nodded, which was about all he could manage right then.

Mitch figured they'd just about hand him all the medals when he got back to headquarters, because here he had the answer to the harassment, and if the D.A. was on his toes he could get things started against Reed before the statute ran out.

Only what happened was, Bankhart met him as he came in. "Get a load of this," Bank said, and he was all hopped up. "We finally located this Patsy and she backed up Purdue's story, so the lieutenant got hold of Reed and found out what it was all about. Statute of limitations was running, see? So Reed hired a guy named Norwich—"

Mitch interrupted. "Yeah," he said. "So what else is new?" Then he went past Bank and headed for a phone, to tell Amy the heat was off and she and the kids could relax. Because when you came down to it that was all that mattered—Amy and the kids.

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## CHALLENGE TO THE READER

*Here is one of the strangest and most perplexing stories that EQMM has published in more than 35 years. What is the author telling us? Read the story and, if you wish, send us your explanation. For the three most interesting interpretations we will award $50 each . . . More comment when you have finished reading the story . . .*

# THE EMPTY CHAIR

**by ANNE BRASHLER**

It is an inside room with no windows. We breathe recycled air. The floor is carpeted with thick piles of green tufts and the four walls are covered with animal skins alternated with strips of dark blue velvet. A clock on the wall has a minute hand which jumps ahead every three minutes, just like the one in a school I attended a long time ago—Miss Pfister's third grade.

Eleven of us are waiting. All are strangers to me and to each other. We have been instructed not to communicate until the chairs are filled.

The table is set for twelve, five on each side, one at each end: twelve water glasses, filled, are evenly spaced, twelve pencils, sharpened to deadly points, placed diagonally across twelve five-by-eight-inch pads of paper. Twelve ashtrays. No one has disturbed anything on the table. We have been instructed not to.

It is difficult to guess what is expected of us so we sit here doing nothing. The one chair, still empty, is directly across from me. I wonder about the person who will occupy it. Will it be a man? A woman? There is no way of knowing.

The people around the table are young, old, of both sexes. The gentleman on my right is wearing a stickpin in his tie and the girl on my left, popping bubble gum, seems barely in her teens. I, myself, am old. Seventy-eight to be exact, but my *joie de vivre* is ageless.

I wonder if anyone here is in my field, or perhaps one that is

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related—music, writing, sculpture. I am a cartoonist, the recipient of national awards too numerous to mention. Even so, my byline consists of initials only, for those who choose to conclude I am a man. Even today there is a prejudice.

All of us have been avoiding eye contact for over two hours. Since one's natural inclination is to acknowledge the presence of another, this is a difficult thing to do. The eye strays, the foot moves. Living is to share. Communication is always present in my cartoons—if not with another person, then with a bird, a rock, a drop of water. Relating. Touching.

The ten people around me are sitting stiff as mummies. I keep checking my watch, winding it a half turn so as not to break the spring.

I don't know how long we'll be here. No one does. I have a great urge to cross the room and touch the skins. If they are real, how many animals were killed one by one to cover these civilized walls?

The atmosphere is like the inside of a church or a tomb. Automated noises emanating from the clock, the lights, the air conditioner, sound like a continual death toll. The girl has stopped popping her gum and is chewing quietly as if she, too, senses this.

Time seems to stand still. Maybe I've miscounted the hours and the two o'clock which my watch shows is early morning rather than mid-afternoon. A lamp is suspended over the table. The light is bright, white almost, with a bluish cast which seems to dig into our pores.

I wish we had a window. Impossible to stare at the dried skins, tough as leather, and imagine the world outside—people shopping, talking, laughing. A snowstorm or a heat wave could be going on for all we know. Maybe, when we closed the door behind us in this room, we slipped into a kind of nether land in a fourth dimension. I think: If we are in suspension, would I hear the ticking of my watch? I hold it close to my ear and the sound is like the soft pulse of a tiny animal. A field mouse, perhaps.

Last Tuesday morning the Foundation, a panel of silent benefactors with impeccable credentials, asked me to help them with a "situation." "Of course," I said. "How? When? Where?" I'd been hoping they would call me at least once before I died. They supported me at the time I needed it; the least I could do is return the favor.

A bellhop had delivered a sealed envelope on Tuesday aft-

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ernoon. The message inside was brief, specific, anonymous. I've told no one because I was asked not to.

I wonder if the others have come because of the Foundation? Possibly. But not necessarily. They could have been got in touch with by a number of organizations. But we have all received the same instructions. I can tell—not one of us has broken a rule.

I try to judge the others, to see if they are growing impatient. Are they angry that they have been inconvenienced? I didn't mind coming, but I did think the meeting would start on time, that everyone would be punctual. Surely the twelfth person would have no more difficulty than I. It took me two transfers and one crosstown to get here.

The others are beginning to move in their chairs, this one crossing knees, that one easing his foot out of a shoe. The man with the stickpin has taken off his tie and put it in his pocket. I like him. He seems to be on my wave length.

I'm getting thirsty and have to go to the bathroom, but I dare not leave or drink the water. Nor do the others. We have been instructed not to. We are to remain silent in our chairs until twelve people are present. I have been staring at the empty space before me for so long, my eyes are playing tricks on me. A shadow, a haze like fog seems to be hovering over the chair opposite. Its swaying movements are mesmerizing.

I look at the others to see if they have noticed. They are like statues, but the man next to me has tensed as if his muscles were shifting gear. The water glasses are still filled to the brim. No one has smoked. The people facing me have glazed eyes as if they are drugged. I listen for sounds of breathing but hear only the jumping of the clock hand as it falls into mechanical slots.

Suddenly, on impulse, I pick up my glass of water and drain it empty. It tastes like spring water from a mountain stream. "This has gone on long enough," I say. The others look at me, shocked. "At my age I have no time to waste." My voice is strong. I am glad I broke the silence.

Everyone is watching—to see what I will do next. I feel tremendous energy, strength. Exhilarating, like fresh air from the sea.

The yellow pencil is in my hand. *It is a woman*, I write, describing the shadow in the empty chair. The shadow stops moving and a faint outline begins to take shape. *She is large, fleshy, with a double chin. Dark hair.*

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I tear off sheets of paper from the pad and begin to sketch her. Soft blending strokes, using the side of the pencil. She has a smile. My God, what a smile!

My heart is beating so fast I can scarcely breathe. The sound of voices in the room grows louder, like a celebration. The girl on my left urges me on. "Don't stop," she says. "Don't stop." My pencil flies over the page, faster and faster.

I smell smoke. Someone has lit a cigarette. Finally my drawing is finished. "She's here!" the girl on my left cries.

I glance up and across the table I see my lady in the flesh, smiling. She is exactly like my drawing, even to the mole near her mouth. Behind her, on the wall, the animal skins make a movement, like a shiver. So slight I would have missed it save for the man with the stickpin. "My God!" he cries. "The animals!"

The lady in the twelfth chair is still smiling. "Thank you," she says. "Shall we begin?"

## PRIZE CONTEST

Editorial Comment: What did the author have in mind? We asked her and she replied: "Since rules and regulations are created by humans, they are meant to be questioned by humans."

So with that hint—where are the twelve people meeting? When does that meeting take place? Who is the twelfth person? . . . Don't write a story, just a letter or even a postcard. For the three most interesting solutions we will award $50 each. It is agreed that the decisions of our editorial staff will be accepted as final by all contestants, and that no one connected with Davis Publications, Inc. may enter the contest. All entries must be postmarked no later than April 1, 1977, and we will announce the names of the three winners in EQMM as soon as possible after the closing date.

Good luck, and happy theorizing!

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**
**CELIA FREMLIN**

*Emmeline Fosdyke, 87, spinster, no relatives, living alone, completely disabled, a house-bound—a genuine case of maximum need. And yet she insisted on not having a telephone, her only "link with the outside world." Why did Miss Emmeline Fosdyke consider a telephone "too dangerous"?*

*Surely Celia Fremlin must have first-hand knowledge of the helpless, dependent women who live in Sheltered Housing for the Elderly. This case record is perhaps unique . . .*

# A CASE OF MAXIMUM NEED

**by *CELIA FREMLIN***

"No, no telephone, thank you. It's too dangerous," said Miss Emmeline Fosdyke decisively; and the young welfare worker, only recently qualified, and working for the first time in this Sheltered Housing Unit for the Elderly, blinked up from the form she was filling in.

"*No telephone?* But, Miss Fosdyke, in your—I mean, with your—well, your arthritis, and not being able to get about and everything . . . You're on our House-Bound list, you know that, don't you? As a House-Bound Pensioner, you're entitled—well, I mean, it's a *necessity*, isn't it, a telephone? It's your link with the outside world!"

This last sentence, a verbatim quote from her just-completed Geriatric Course, made Valerie Coombe feel a little more confident. She went on, "You *must* have a telephone, Miss Fosdyke! It's your *right!* And if it's the cost you're worrying about, then do please set your mind at rest. Our Department—anyone over sixty-five and in need—"

"I'm not in need," asserted Miss Fosdyke woodenly. "Not of a telephone, anyway."

There had been nothing in the Geriatric Course to prepare Val-

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erie for this. She glanced round the pin-new Sheltered Housing flatlet for inspiration, but she saw none. Its bland, purpose-built contours were as empty of ideas as was the incomplete form in front of her. "Telephone Allowance. In Cases of Maximum Need . . ."

It was a case of maximum need, all right. Valerie took another quick look at the papers in her file.

Fosdyke, Emmeline J. Retired dressmaker, unmarried. No relatives. One hundred percent disability: arthritis, diabetes, cardiovascular degeneration, motor-neurone dysfunction.

The case notes made it all so clear. Valerie glanced up from the precise, streamlined data and was once again confronted with a person—an actual, quirky, incomprehensible person, a creature whose eyes, sunk in helpless folds of withered skin, yet glittered with some impenetrable secret defiance.

Why couldn't old sick people just *be* old and sick, the poor girl wondered despairingly. Why did they have to be so many other things as well, things for which there was no space allotted on the form, and which just didn't fit in *anywhere?*

"But suppose you were *ill*, Miss Fosdyke?" Valerie hazarded, her eyes fixed on all that list of incapacitating disabilities. "Suppose—?"

"Well, *of course* I'm ill!" snapped back Miss Fosdyke. "I've been ill for years, and I'll get iller. Old people do. Why do I have to have a telephone as well?"

Valerie's brain raked desperately through the course notes of only a few months ago. Dangers to Watch Out For in Geriatric Practice. Isolation. Mental Confusion. Hypothermia. Lying dead for days until the milkman happens to notice the half-dozen unclaimed bottles . . .

An *easy* job, they'd told her back in the office—an easy job for Valerie's first solo assignment. Simply going from door to door in the Sheltered Housing block, and arranging for a free telephone for those who qualified, either by age or disability or both. She'd pictured to herself the gratitude in the watery old eyes as she broke the good news, imagined the mumbling but effusive expressions of gratitude.

Why couldn't Miss Fosdyke be like that? Eighty-seven and helpless—why the hell couldn't she?

"Miss Fosdyke, you *must* have a telephone!" Valerie repeated, a note of desperation creeping into her voice as she launched into

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these unknown waters beyond the cosy boundaries of the Geriatric Course. "Surely you can see that you must? I mean, in your situation—suppose you needed a doctor?"

"Nobody of my age needs a doctor," Miss Fosdyke retorted crisply. "Look at my case notes there, you can see for yourself the things I've got. Incurable, all of them. There's not a doctor in the world who can cure a single one of them, so why should I have to be bothered with a doctor who can't?"

Obstinate. Difficult. Blind to their own interests. Naturally, the course had dealt with these attributes of the aging process, but in such bland, non-judgmental terms that when you finally came upon the real thing, it was only just recognizable.

But recognizable, nevertheless. Be friendly but firm, and don't become involved in argument. Smilingly, Valerie put Miss Fosdyke down for a free telephone, and left the flat, all optimism and bright words.

"Hope you'll soon be feeling better, Miss Fosdyke," she called cheerfully as she made her way out, and then on her long lithe young legs she almost ran down the corridor in order not to hear the old thing's riposte: "Better? Don't be silly, dear, I'll be feeling worse. I'll go on feeling worse until I'm dead. Everyone does at my age. Don't they teach you *anything* but lies at that training place of yours?"

"*What* a morning!" Valerie confided, half laughing and half sighing with relief, to her lunch companions in the staff canteen. "There was this poor old thing, you see, getting on for ninety, who was supposed to be applying for a free telephone, and do you know what she said . . .?"

And while the others leaned forward, all agog for a funny story to brighten the day's work, Valerie set herself to making the anecdote as amusing as she knew how, recalling Miss Fosdyke's exact words, in all their incongruous absurdity: "No, no telephone, thank you. It's too dangerous."

*Too dangerous!* What *could* the old thing mean? Ribald suggestions about breathy male voices late at night ricocheted round the table; anecdotes of personal experiences almost took the conversation away from Miss Fosdyke and her bizarre attitude, and it was only with difficulty that Valerie brought it back.

At *eighty-seven!*—she should be so lucky!—this was the general reaction of the others. Of course, the girls admitted, one did read

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occasionally of old women being assaulted as well as robbed—look at that great-grandmother found stripped and murdered behind her own sweet-shop counter only a few months ago. And then a few years back there had been that old girl in an Islington basement defending her honor with a carving knife. Still, you couldn't say it was common.

"At *eighty-seven!*" they kept repeating, wonderingly, giggling a little at the absurdity of it. Consciously and gloriously exposed to all the dangers of being young and beautiful, they could well afford to smile pityingly, to shrug, and to forget.

It was nearly three months after the telephone had been installed that Miss Fosdyke first heard the heavy masculine breathing. It was late on a Sunday night—around midnight, as is usual with this type of anonymous caller—and it so happened that Miss Fosdyke was not in bed yet; she was dozing uneasily in her big chair, too tired after her hard day to face the slow and exhausting business of undressing and preparing for bed.

For it *had* been a hard day, as Sundays so often were for the inhabitants of the Sheltered Housing block. Sunday was the day when relatives of all ages, bearing flowers and pot plants in proportion to their guilt, came billowing in through the swing doors to spend an afternoon of stunned boredom with their dear ones; or, alternatively, to escort the said dear ones, on their crutches and in their wheel chairs, to spend a few hours in the tiny, miserable outside world.

Just *how* tiny and miserable it was, Emmeline Fosdyke knew very well, because once every six weeks her old friend Gladys would come with her husband (arthritic himself, these days) to take Emmeline to tea in their tall, dark, bickering home—hoisting her over their awkward front doorstep, sitting her down in front of a plate of stale scones and a cup of stewed tea, and expecting her to be envious. Envious not of their happiness, for they had none, but simply of their marriage. Surely any marriage, however horrible, merits the envy of a spinster of 87?

Especially when, as in this case, the marriage is based on the long-ago capture by one dear old friend of the other dear old friend's fiancé—a soldier boy of the First World War he'd been then, very dashing and handsome in his khaki battle dress, though you'd never have guessed it now. Emmeline remembered as if it was yesterday that blue-and-gold October afternoon, the

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last afternoon of his leave, when she had lost him.

"He says you're frigid!" Gladys had whispered gleefully, brushing the golden leaves from her skirt, all lit up with having performed a forbidden act and destroyed a friend's happiness all in one crowded afternoon. "He says . . ."

Details had followed—surprisingly intimate for that day and age, but unforgettable. Only later, emboldened partly by old age and partly by a changing climate of opinion, had Emmeline found herself wondering how responsive Gladys herself had proved to be over the subsequent 55 years. Naturally Emmeline had never asked, nor would Gladys ever have answered. But maybe Gladys' tight bitter mouth and the gray defeated features of the once-carefree soldier boy were answer enough.

The visit on this particular Sunday had been more than usually exhausting. To start with, there had been seedcake for tea instead of the usual scones, and the seeds had got in behind Emmeline's dentures, causing her excruciating embarrassment and discomfort; and on top of this, Gladys' budgerigar, who had been saying "Percy wants a grape!" at intervals of a minute and a half for the last eleven years, had died the previous Wednesday, and this left a gap in the conversation which was hard to fill.

And so, what with the seed cake and the car journey and the boredom and the actual physical effort of putting up with it all, Emmeline Fosdyke arrived back at the Sheltered Housing unit in a state of complete exhaustion. She couldn't be bothered even to make herself a cup of tea, or turn on the television; she didn't feel up to anything more than sitting in her armchair and waiting for bedtime.

She hadn't meant to fall asleep. She'd learned long ago that when you are old, sleep has to be budgeted just as carefully as money: if you use up too much of it during the day, there'll be none left for the night. So she'd intended just to sit there, awake but thinking of nothing in particular, until the hands of her watch pointed to a quarter to ten and it would be time to start preparing for bed.

But it is hard to think of nothing in particular after 87 years. Out of all those jumbled decades heaped up behind, *something* will worm itself to the surface; and thus it was that as Emmeline's head sank farther and farther toward her chest, and her eyelids began to close, a formless, half-forgotten anxiety began nibbling and needling at the fringes of her brain—some-

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thing from long, long ago, over and done with really, and yet still with the power to goad.

Must hurry, must hurry, must get out of here—this was the burden that nagged at her last wisps of consciousness. Urgency pounded behind her closed eyes—a sense of trains to catch, of doors to bolt, of decisions to make. And now there seemed to be voices approaching—shouts—cars drawing up—luggage only half packed.

Slumped in her deep chair, Emmeline Fosdyke's sleeping limbs twitched ever so slightly to the ancient crisis; the slow blood pumped into her flaccid muscles a tiny extra supply of oxygen to carry the muscles through the dream chase along streets long since bulldozed; her breath came infinitesimally quicker, her old lungs expanded to some miniscule degree at the need for running, running, running through a long-dead winter dawn . . .

It was the telephone that woke her. Stunned by the suddenness of it, and by its stupefying clamor erupting into her dreams, Emmeline sat for a few moments in a state of total bewilderment. Who? Where? And then, gradually, it all came back to her.

It was all right. It was here. It was now. She, Emmeline Fosdyke, 87 years old, sitting comfortably in her own chair in her own room on a peaceful Sunday evening. She was home. She was safe—safe back from that awful outing to Gladys' house, and with a full six weeks before she need think about going there again. There was nothing to worry about. Nothing at all. Nothing, certainly, to set her heart beating in this uncomfortable way, thundering in her eardrums, pulsing behind her eyes.

Except, of course, the telephone, which was still ringing. Ringing, ringing as if it would never stop. Who could possibly be telephoning her on a Sunday evening as late as—oh, dear, what *was* the time? With eyes still blurred by sleep, Emmeline peered at her watch and saw, with a little sense of shock, that it was past midnight.

Midnight! She must have been dozing here for hours! That meant that even with a sleeping pill, she'd never—

And still the telephone kept on ringing; and now, her mind slowly coming into focus, it dawned on Miss Fosdyke that she would have to answer it.

"Hello?" she half whispered, her old voice husky and tremulous with sleep. Then from force of habit she said, "This is Emmeline Fosdyke, 497-6402. Who. . . ?"

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There was no answer. Only the slow measured sound of someone breathing—breathing loudly, and with deliberate intention; the sounds pounded against her ear like the slow reverberation of the sea. In, out. In, out.

For several seconds Miss Fosdyke simply sat there, speechless, the hand that clutched the instrument growing slowly damp with sweat, and her mind reeling with indecision. During her long decades of solitary bed-sitter life, she'd had calls of this nature quite a number of times, and she knew very well there was no infallible method for dealing with them. If you simply hung up without a word, then they were liable to ring again later in the night; if, on the other hand, you *did* speak, then they were as likely as not to launch forth immediately into a long rambling monologue of obscene suggestions. It was a nerve-racking situation for an old woman all on her own in an empty flat and late at night.

Miss Fosdyke decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Listen," she said, trying to speak quietly and control the quivering of her voice. "Listen, I don't know who you are or why you're calling me, but I think I ought to tell you that I'm—"

That I'm what? Eighty-seven years old? All on my own? Crippled with arthritis? About to call the police?

That would be a laugh! Anyone who has been an elderly spinster for as long as Emmeline Fosdyke knows well enough what to expect from officialdom if she complains of molestation. No, no policemen, thank you. Not any more. Not ever again.

But no matter. Her decisive little speech seemed to have done the trick this time. With a tiny click the receiver at the other end was replaced softly, and Emmeline leaned back with a sigh of relief, even with a certain sense of pride in what she had accomplished. Funny how these sort of calls always came when you were least prepared for them—late at night, like this one, or even in the small hours, rousing you from your deepest sleep.

Like that awful time five years ago—or was it six?—when she'd been living all alone in that dark dismal flat off the Holloway Road. Even now she still trembled when she thought about that night, and how it might have ended. And then there was that other time, only a few years earlier, when she'd just moved into that bed-sitter in Wandsworth. There, too, the telephone had only recently been installed, just as it had been here . . .

Well, I *told* her, didn't I? That prissy, know-it-all little chit of a welfare worker—no one can say that I didn't warn her! I *told* her

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that a telephone was dangerous, but of course she had to know better, she with her potty little three-year Training Course which she thinks qualifies her to be right about everything for evermore!

Training Course indeed!—as if life itself wasn't a training course much tougher and more exacting than anything the Welfare could think up, if it sat on its bloody committees yakkety-yakking for a thousand years!

Nearly one o'clock now. Emmeline still had not dared to undress, or to make any of her usual preparations for the night. Even though it was more than half an hour since she'd hung up on her mysterious caller, she still could not relax. Of course, it was more than possible that nothing further would happen, that the wretched fellow had given up, turned his attentions elsewhere. Still, you couldn't be sure. It was best to be prepared.

And so, her light switched off as an extra precaution, and a blanket wrapped round her against the encroaching chill of the deepening night, Emmeline sat wide-awake in the velvety darkness, waiting.

It was very quiet here in this great block of flats at this unaccustomed hour. Not a footstep, not a cough, not so much as the creaking of a door. Even the caretaker must be asleep by now, down in his boiler room in the depths of the building.

Emmeline had never been awake and listening at such an hour before. Her mind went back to earlier night calls when the sounds outside had grown sharper, louder. Did she hear them again?

Emmeline was trembling now, from head to foot. She'd never get out of it this time, never! Ten years ago—even five—she'd at least have been mobile, able to slip through a doorway, to get away from the house, and if necessary stay away for days, or even for weeks.

Not now, though. This time she would be helpless, a sitting duck. And as this thought went through her mind, she became aware, through the humming of her hearing aid, of a new sound, a sound quite distinct and unmistakable, the sharp click of the latch as her door handle was being quietly turned.

Softly, expertly, making no noise at all, Emmeline Fosdyke reached into the darkness for the long sharp carving knife that always lay in readiness.

It was a shame, really, having had to do this to them, after having been so nice to them on the phone, after having given them

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her name and everything, and encouraging them to think that her tense husky whisper was the voice of a young girl. It was a real shame; but then, what else could she have done?

In the deep darkness, the unknown male lips coarse and urgent against her own, she would have her brief moment of glory, a strange miraculous moment when it really seemed that the anonymous, ill-smelling mackintosh of some stranger was indeed a khaki battle dress of long ago, that the blind clutchings in the darkness were the tender caresses of her first love. For those few wild incredible seconds, in the meaningless grip of some greasy, grunting stranger, she would be young again, and loved again, under the poignant blueness of a wartime summer sky.

During those mad brief moments she could allow hard masculine fingers to fumble with her cardigan in the darkness, and with the buttons of her blouse, scrabbling their way nearer and nearer . . . a shame it was, a crying shame, that at exactly that moment, just before the eager questing fingers had discovered the sagging, empty loops of skin and had recoiled in horror—that was the moment when she'd had to stab the poor nameless fellow, if possible in the heart.

*Had* to. It was self-defense. Even the law had agreed about that, on the rare occasions when the law had caught up with her.

She'd *had* to do it—*had* to stab them all, swiftly and surely, before they'd had a chance to discover how old she was.

"No, no telephone, thank you. It's too dangerous"—for them.

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**a *NEW* short story by**
**JOYCE HARRINGTON**

*A gem of a story, also included in this issue to celebrate the 36th anniversary of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . .*

*The author told us that directly after finishing this story, she went out and mowed her lawn . . .*

# GRASS

## *by JOYCE HARRINGTON*

If you're looking for a story about the joys and woes, the highs and lows, of pot, tea, mary jane, marijuana, *cannabis sativa*, you're looking on the wrong page. This is a story about grass. Plain old common everyday green growing grass. My name is Jennings Hopwell and I have a lawn to mow.

In Riverside Terrace where I live there are many lawns, and between the lawns there are houses, trees, flowers, vegetable gardens, dogs, and neighbors. It is spring, and my neighbor on the left has planted seemly rows of vegetables. He does this every spring. In their season his rows will be heavy with tomatoes, neat clusters of beans, sprawling squash, and secret underground radishes. Then he will cross our boundary, his arms or a basket filled with the smooth green offspring of his labors. He will come to where I lie in my hammock and he will say, "Got a lot of zucchini this year, Jennings. Thought you might like some."

And I will say, "Thanks a lot, Henry."

After he leaves, I will lurch out of my hammock and into my house where I will feed the long green zucchini to the garbage disposal, relishing its voracious slurp and grind. I hate zucchini. If I let Eloise get her hands on it, she will cook it as a duty to the bountiful earth and serve it as an object lesson to me. I am no gardener. I can barely keep ahead of the grass. This year I think I won't even try.

On my right, a young man feeds his lawn. He spreads sack

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after white plastic sack of nitrogen-rich lawn food lovingly on the nascent blades of grass. All through the summer he will mow it, trim it, water it, fondle it, and gaze with delight on its lush green body. It is almost embarrassing to watch this love affair between man and grass. He has a small pretty wife and one of those babies that never seems to make a mess of itself. His cottage is small and neat. His car is small and never loses its polish. Altogether, a small well-ordered life. Except for his unbridled passion for his lawn.

How convenient to have your mistress always at hand, constant and true, right outside your door! What a satisfaction to carry on a liaison right under the unsuspecting noses of wife, baby, and community. What does he do all winter while he waits for her to rise, like Persephone from the Underworld, and send forth her tender green beckoning shoots? Eloise often holds him up to me as a perfect example of lawnmanship.

"Why can't you get our lawn to look like Peter's?"

When I was a young man, it seemed right and proper to have a lawn to mow. I had a wife, a job with a future, the prospect of family responsibilities. I always did the right thing. But somehow, over the years, the rightness of things has lost its savor.

Summer is coming again, and if we had cuckoos I'm sure they would be singing lewdly. As it is, we have fat complacent robins chockful of worms, squawking bluejays, flashy cardinals, and the occasional militant woodpecker. And the constant sputtering roar of the indigenous lawnmower. It's time to put up my hammock.

My hammock is the one thing I have that is truly mine. Its label, now faded, says that it comes from Yucatan. I have never been to Yucatan, or a lot of other places, but the strings of my hammock are spun of rain forests and shimmering toucans, of crumbling stone monuments and virgin sacrifices. I can dream, can't I? I bought it from an ad in *The New Yorker*.

Eloise hates my hammock. To her it represents sinful sloth. Its strings are gray now, with many summers stretched between two maple trees. "An eyesore," she says. "Dirty old thing," she says. She has offered to wash it and threatened to burn it.

"Hands off the hammock," I say to these perennial menaces. And she knows I mean it. She frowns and bides her time.

Now as I clump down the cellar steps, I toss a "Nice day!" over my shoulder. She is fussing with something in the kitchen. Eloise is always fussing with something, when she's not making lists.

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Eloise is a great list-maker. Shopping lists, lists of people she intends to badger into some community activity, lists of things to do and of things for me to do. I have even found her making lists she must make.

"You're getting that thing out, aren't you?" She never calls it by name, as if she might eradicate it by starving it of recognition. "Why don't you let me wash it before you put it up this year?"

I believe she hopes that once she has it captive in the washing machine, she can pummel it with some vicious detergent (punch, hit, kill!) and put it out of its misery. I'm sure she dreams of its gray strings dissolving in the wash water and slithering down the drain to the septic tank.

"I'm terribly sorry, darling," she will say, "but when I went to get it, it just wasn't there. Not a shred." With a sad superior smile.

My hammock spends the winter in a box on a shelf in the cellar. As I open the box, a thick sour smell of mildew arises. Nothing to worry about. A few hours in the sunshine between the maple trees, and the mold will dry up and blow away.

"Oof! What's that smell?" she says as I come up from the cellar and pass through the kitchen on my way outside. "Listen. Before you get settled down in that thing, I have some chores for you to do. Let's see. I made a list." She shuffles papers on her countertop desk. "Here we are. First of all, get the lawnmower out and see if it's working. Should have been done weeks ago. If not working, get fixed. If working, mow lawn."

She reads from her list in a telegraphic style that means I am but another object she must whip into shape so that her lists will balance out and sprout those definitive check marks that signify missions accomplished. She continues, not noticing the slow clockwork shaking of my head or the grin that quirks the corners of my mouth.

"Then clean garage, fix broken windowpane, paint mailbox, trim hedge, buy new rake. Some of this you can do tomorrow."

"The old rake is good enough."

She looks up, startled. "But it's broken."

"What I mean. Good enough for all the raking I'm going to do."

She opens her mouth to protest, but I get there first.

"No, Eloise. No, no, no, and no. I am not going to mow lawn. Nor am I going to clean garage, fix window, paint mailbox, or trim hedge. Not now, not tomorrow, not never."

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"That's bad grammar," she snaps.

"Nevertheless. I am not going to do any of those things. I am going to meditate in my moldy hammock. And when I am not meditating, I am going to read. Would you like to know what I'm going to read? Perhaps you'd better make a list. I'm going to read of faraway places and impossible adventures. I'm going to read of climbing Mount Everest and exploring the Great Barrier Reef.

"I'm going to read of places that never were and never will be—of Utopia and Erehwon and Oz. And then I'm going to read of beautiful Circassian girls with hair like the fleece of the golden lamb and of shining black maidens with proud necks and melting eyes. And when I've read all that, I'm going to read airline schedules and railroad timetables. I've always wanted to travel on the Trans-Siberian Express. Have you got that all down?"

"You're crazy," she says.

"I'm crazy."

"Who's going to mow the lawn?"

"Beats me."

"I'll burn that thing. I swear I will."

"I'll kill you. I swear I will."

She looks thoughtful.

It is full summer in Riverside Terrace. The Fourth of July. Last night there were sporadic firecrackers in the woods. The police were kept busy rounding up boys. It makes a nice change from rounding up unfettered dogs. This morning there was a parade—the new fire engine, the Boy Scouts, the high-school band.

Now it is noon and I lie in my hammock with my book pyramided open on my stomach. I am wearing old khaki shorts and nothing else. The high sun filters down through the maple leaves. It's a fine day.

My neighbor, Henry Stout, approaches from the left. His arms are not filled with zucchini. He wears a red shirt, blue and white plaid shorts, and an expression of concern (level eyes, pursed lips, a small frown). He treads gingerly through the unmown grass as if some viper, scorpion, or krait might attack his knee socks.

"Are you coming to the Village picnic, Jennings?"

I look up at him from my web of detachment.

"I have been up the White Nile and down the Blue Nile. I have eaten human flesh in the Andes Mountains. And I have made the Golden Journey to Samarkand. I am not coming to the picnic.

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Eloise, I believe, has made some pies."

I can see her watching from the kitchen window. Her eyes lately betray a certain wariness. She makes more lists than ever. I have entered into negotiations to sell my business, Jennings Hopwell Associates. She knows this and is uneasy.

My neighbor blinks and takes up another subject.

"About your lawn, Jennings." His frown deepens. He glares at my bare chest, brown and matted with grizzled hair, and shifts his anger to my naked feet, admittedly rather dirty.

"What about my lawn?" I remain calm and equable.

"Well, it's come up in Village Council."

"Ho, ho!" I laugh. "And ha, ha! Not as nicely as it's coming up here. Have you nothing better to do in Council? Item: J. Hopwell's seedy lawn. What did Council decide?"

"They asked me to come and speak to you. Seriously, Jennings, it looks awful and everybody's concerned. Not just about the lawn. About you. Is something wrong?"

"Nothing wrong. Everything right."

"Well, how can you just lie in that hammock all summer? It's not normal. We never see you at the Country Club any more. Eloise comes down sometimes to swim but she seems, I don't know, strange sort of. Hard to talk to. She was never like that before."

"Don't I know it."

"So it occurred to me, Jennings—I don't want you to think I'm prying—but if you and Eloise are having some trouble, some . . . um . . . marital difficulty," he spoke the words in a hushed tone as one who might speak of a dreadful disease, and finished in a rush, "it might be worth your while to get some counseling. Put you on the right track again. Nothing to be ashamed of."

"Henry, your face is as red as your shirt. They've given you a dirty job to do. But I don't hold it against you. You go back and tell them you've done your duty."

I beckon him closer and he bends reluctantly to hear my confidential murmur. "Just between you and me, Henry, I think Eloise is planning to leave me. I think she's in love with a younger man. A much younger man. It wouldn't surprise me if she just runs off with him one fine day. But I wouldn't want it to get around. You understand. She may come to her senses yet. We have to be very patient. These are troublesome times."

Henry rears back like a frightened rabbit. Astonishingly he

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believes me. People will believe anything if it's bizarre enough.

"I can't believe it," he says. "Eloise! Who is he? Anyone we know?"

"No names, Henry. I can't blame him. She's an attractive woman."

"Oh, she is. She certainly is that." Henry hitches up his plaid shorts. They tend to gravitate below his budding paunch. "Well, no wonder you've been upset. Say, listen. Why don't I send my boys over to cut your grass?"

"Not necessary, Henry. I'll take care of it in due time. That's a promise."

"Well, all right. Sure you won't come to the picnic?"

"Sure."

"I'll bring you over some zucchini later. And, Jennings, my lips are sealed."

"Carry on, Wing Commander."

"What?"

"Thanks a lot, Henry."

I watch him thread his way back through the undergrowth, shying at grasshoppers. Good old Henry. I know I can rely on him. Male solidarity. We boys have to stick together. And before the picnic is over, the whole village of Riverside Terrace will know about Eloise and her youthful lover. I pick up my book, but only get one paragraph further when I am accosted again.

"What did he want?"

Eloise really is an attractive woman. The years have somewhat sharpened her features and she affects a glossy veneer of makeup and mannerism. Her style is suburban managerial and she gets things done. But I am tired of being managed. Now that our children have grown and left home, she lacks scope. I am also tired of having a lawn to mow, whether I do it myself or hire it done. It's a matter of principle. We should have bought a condominium in town, but Eloise wouldn't hear of it.

"Who?" I ask disingenuously.

"Henry Stout. What did he want?" She stands, hands on slim hips, her superbly tinted hair gleaming in the sun.

"Oh, he wanted me to go to the picnic."

"Are you going?"

"No. He wanted me to cut the grass. He wondered if we were having any 'marital difficulty.' Our grass has come up in Village Council."

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"What!"

"They sent Henry as an emissary. He suggested counseling."

"For the grass?"

"No, for us. He's very subtle, our Henry. He figures that once we get our problems straightened out, the grass will take care of itself."

"What problems? What did you tell him? Henry Stout is the biggest gossip in the village."

"Is that a fact? I only told him the truth. That I would cut the grass in due time."

"And when will that be, may I ask?"

"How about Labor Day?"

"If you don't get out of that hammock, I'll set fire to it with you in it." Eloise does not become beautiful with rage.

"Violence is the curse of our culture."

"You are the curse of my life. I'm going to the picnic. If you want any dinner, you'll have to forage for yourself."

"Have a nice time."

She stalks away and I draw the edges of my hammock around me. Snug in my cocoon, I compose my thoughts into an orderly sequence of ports of call. New York, Southampton, Calais, Gibraltar. I fall asleep somewhere off the Azores with the scent of gardenias in my nostrils.

I am awakened by a shrieking of gulls. The afternoon is blue with long shadows and the lawnmowers are dormant. Eloise is crying loudly. In the distance I can hear the high-school band attempting to play *Columbia the Gem of the Ocean*.

"It's your fault!" she cries. "If you would cut the grass, I wouldn't be subjected to this kind of embarrassment."

"What kind?" I ask, truly interested.

"You know the kind," she sputters. "Everyone was perfectly polite, but ever so distant. They were giving me the treatment. No one would eat with me but Bitsy Burkhalter and she never knows what's going on. I felt like one of her stray cats. And to top it all off, I was just about to ask the Marshall boy if his scout troup could use that old canoe in the garage, when his mother swooped down and dragged him away as if I had leprosy. I was never so mortified in my life."

Good old Henry. I make my face look sympathetic and swing myself out of the hammock. There is a breeze off the river and it raises gooseflesh on my arms.

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"Eloise, let's move into town. We can get a good price for the house and I've had my eye on a brand-new condominium." I put my arm around her shoulder, but she stiffens and moves away.

"Never! This is my home and all my friends are here. What would I do in town?"

"Some friends!"

"It's all your fault, Jennings." She sniffles and gropes for a hankie in her straw bag. "It's all because you're being so stupid about the lawn. You're ruining my life."

"Eloise, let's wander around the world. I'll show you the steppes of Central Asia. We'll take a camel caravan to Timbuctoo. I'll feed you strawberries in Bokhara and honey on Mount Hymettus. Let's drink melted snow on top of the Jungfrau."

For a moment there is a light in her eyes, but it is quickly quenched in a fresh burst of tears.

"Don't be silly," she wails and flings herself away from me. "They'll be sorry. They can't do this to me."

I follow her slowly. Eloise can be quite stubborn.

July drones into August. The grass has grown tall and is bent and burnt by the sun. There are bare spots. I have almost exhausted the resources of our tiny branch library. Eloise has reached a fine frenzy of list-making, but nothing gets checked off. She eyes me and my hammock with unconcealed malevolence. I will have to do something about her before she does something about me.

Henry Stout no longer comforts me with zucchini. Not after he caught me digging shallow graves and burying his largess. My lawn is dotted with rotting zucchini and tall unnameable weeds. These weeds have a certain malignant beauty. There is one that grows a thick hairy stem and decks itself with poisonous-looking purple berries. Another produces broad flat leaves and an unpleasant smell. They are universally despised by all right-thinking people. I have come to cherish them.

I have sold my business at a tidy profit and am almost ready to go. I am only debating whether or not to take my hammock with me. Eloise steadfastly refuses to budge. She says I am too old to bum around the world and she has many things to do. She tells me again and again that I am crazy even to consider it. She may be right, but I have my passport ready.

I have returned my last book to the library. As I drive up to the

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house through a steady drenching rain, I see smoke rising from the chimney. There is a hint of fall in the wet drooping trees and a fire in the fireplace will be welcome.

Eloise is crouched before the fire. It isn't burning well and there is a lot of smoke and sizzle. Perhaps the wood is wet. The carpet is thick and in my sad wet sneakers I reach the fireplace before Eloise realizes I am in the room. I pick up the poker thinking only to shake up the logs to make them burn more briskly.

Eloise looks up and there is panic on her face, and guilt. Then I see why the fire is burning so poorly. On top of the logs there lies a gray sodden mass. Some of its strings are blackened and steam hisses from its intricate weavings. She is burning my hammock.

*She is burning my hammock!*

"No!" I scream. But that is all I can say. The poker leaps in my hand. When it is all over, the hammock is safe. A little scorched, perhaps, but it will live again. I cannot say the same for Eloise.

Well.

I'll never know now what it was that finally provoked her to make good on her threats. Perhaps she thought that by depriving me of my hammock, she could extinguish my dream. She was wrong. I would have gone anyway. My plans are to leave right after Labor Day when the tourist season is over. It's just as well that she can never know how miserably she failed. Eloise does not—did not—take easily to failure.

But what shall I do with her now? She lies on the hearth as if sleeping, and except for a slight disarrangement of her hair the damage doesn't show. There is no one I can call and say, "I have this body on my hearthrug. Please come and take it away."

The river, two tree-lined streets away, is rapid and shallow and fringed with picture windows. It will not do. I suppose I'll just have to bury her. But first I must put my hammock back between the maple trees.

Darkness comes early this rainy evening. But I wait until midnight to begin digging. The earth is soft beside my hammock, and the rain shields me like a curtain as I lift the first spadeful. When I finish it is still raining and I stamp the muddy ground with my bare feet. Mud squelches between my toes. My clothes are soaked and filthy. I take them off and fall bone-weary into my hammock.

Lying there beside my underground wife, I let the soft rain wash over me and I review my itinerary. I had thought to take a year or so for my travels. Now there is no need ever to come back.

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I may settle down for good in some out-of-the-way place—a rocky Greek village or a frontier town in the Australian outback. Someplace where grass doesn't grow and lawnmowers are unnecessary.

Before dawn the rain tapers off to a fine mist. I feel clean and very hungry. Soon I will be eating mangoes and honey cakes for breakfast, but now I content myself with dry cereal. As I munch beside the kitchen window, the sun sends bright fingers through the mist. They touch my hammock and the bare rectangle of earth beside it.

It looks very bare and exactly like what it is. A grave. That will never do. I can't go off and leave an obvious grave for anyone to dig into while I'm away. In my closet I find my old gardening clothes. In the garage, a box of grass seed.

In the freshness of the morning I sow grass over Eloise. Then, to keep it all of a piece, I loosen the earth of all the bare spots and sow grass in them. Henry Stout comes out of his house and waves at me. I wave back and call out, "Good morning."

After I have reseeded all the bare spots, it still doesn't look right. The tall old grass needed attention and there are weeds to be chopped. I get out the lawnmower.

Tomorrow is Labor Day. The young grass has fuzzed over the bare spots in my lawn. I have kept the old grass sheared to a respectable length. While waiting for the seed to sprout, I have cleaned garage, fixed window, painted mailbox, and trimmed hedge. I have bought new rake. Today I will plant bulbs, wash car, resurface driveway. My hammock hangs neglected.

Henry Stout crosses our boundary, his arms full of zucchini. "Haven't seen Eloise lately," he says with a rising inflection.

"No, I hit her on the head and planted her under the new grass."

"Ha, ha," he laughs ruefully. "Went off with that young fellow, did she? Well, don't be bitter, Jennings. Maybe she won't come back, ha, ha. Say, listen, why don't you come with us to the Labor Day barbecue tomorrow? Take your mind off things."

"Thanks, Henry. I think I will. And thanks for the zucchini. I have a new recipe I want to try out."

It's going to be a long winter. I hope the library gets in some new travel books. Next year my lawn will look at least as good as Peter's. Maybe better. Maybe I'll plant my own vegetable garden. Squash, tomatoes, radishes, beans. I'd better make a list.

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**a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by EDWARD D. HOCH**

*Once again Dr. Sam Hawthorne, retired New England general practitioner, fishes in his stream of memory and hooks another "impossible crime," another "miracle problem" — how the man known as The Eel, an internationally notorious confidence man, Houdini-ed himself out of an impregnable escape-proof jail . . .*

# THE PROBLEM OF CELL 16

## *by EDWARD D. HOCH*

"Sure," Dr. Sam Hawthorne began, filling the glasses, "there was a time when Northmont made the front pages of papers all across the country. Another small—ah—libation? And some of the stories even mentioned my name. They called me a young New England doctor and that's what I was, back in the late spring o' 1926 when The Eel came to our town . . ."

It was a warm day for May (Dr. Sam remembered), and I'd gone out to Jeff Whitehead's farm to treat a gunshot wound. That in itself was unusual because we didn't get many gunshot wounds in Northmont 'cept durin' huntin' season. Jeff and Mrs. Whitehead had 40 acres of good farmland that he worked with their two teen-age sons. I'd never treated the family for anythin' more serious than the flu, though I'd visited the farm the previous summer to see some giant mushrooms that had sprouted in a back pasture. I wasn't an expert on the subject—mycology, I think it's called—but I was able to confirm they were safe to eat.

This day Matt, the older son, met me at the farmhouse. He was the one who'd telephoned me, and he called out, "This way, Dr. Sam. He's bleedin' bad!"

"Who is?"

"Eustace Carey. He's been shot in the left thigh."

Carey owned one of Northmont's two general stores and he was

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somethin' of a troublemaker. Still, that didn't explain what he was doin' bleedin' from a gunshot wound in Jeff Whitehead's pasture. "How'd it happen?"

"Don't know, Dr. Sam."

I left my yellow Runabout parked by the house and walked back through the fields carryin' my medical bag. We came over a slight rise and there they were—Jeff Whitehead and a man from town named Henkle, both standin' over Eustace Carey. They'd tried to fashion a maskeshift tourniquet around his upper thigh, but it hadn't done much good. I could see at a glance that the wound itself wasn't too serious, though he'd lost a good deal o' blood and that was always dangerous.

"I think I'm dyin', Doc," he said to me.

"Nonsense, Eustace!" I started cuttin' away the trouser leg. "How in hell did this happen?"

"I was walkin' with that gun an' I tripped over a root."

The gun, a long-barreled Colt revolver, lay on the grass nearby "This is hardly the huntin' season," I commented, going to work on the wound.

"We were shootin' at woodchucks," Jeff Whitehead volunteered.

I turned to look at his son Matt and at Rudy Henkle. "All four of you? Where's your wife an' younger boy, Jeff?"

"In town, doin' the shoppin'."

"You know I gotta report gunshot wounds to the sheriff."

"Sure," the wounded man said. "Report it."

When I finished patchin' him up the best I could, I suggested we ride into my office where I could try to probe for the bullet "We may have to put you in the hospital over in Felix for a few days, but you'll pull through all right."

As I was talkin' I picked up the revolver and took it along, and while the other three were busy carryin' Eustace to my car broke open the weapon and examined the cartridges. The gun was fully loaded. It hadn't been fired.

Whoever shot Eustace Carey, it wasn't Eustace himself.

On the way back to town fate played one of its crazy tricks.

I was just approachin' the county road intersection, castin' a glance at my patient to see how he was managin' the trip, when a tan Packard traveling at high speed cut across my path. I tried to slam on my brakes, but it was too late. The front of my Pierce Arrow hit the right front fender of the Packard with a crunch.

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I was out of the car in an instant, runnin' to see if the other driver was injured. He was a short slim man wearin' a drivin' cap to shield his eyes from the sun. He lifted his head as I approached and muttered somethin' in a language that sounded like French. I had the distinct impression he was cursin' me.

"Sorry about this," I told him. "I'm a doctor. I have an injured man in the car."

Without a word he tried to back his car and go around me, but his front fender was so badly crumpled that the wheel wouldn't move. Jeff and his son and Henkle were followin' me in the Whitehead car and now they piled out to see if they could help. The arrival of these others seemed to further disturb the driver. "Look here," he said finally, speakin' English with a thick accent, "get me out of this. I must be on my way!"

I turned to Jeff Whitehead. "My car will still run. Can you tow him into town with yours while I get Eustace to my office? I'm concerned about his leg."

"Sure, Dr. Sam. You go ahead."

I left them at the crossroads, and it was obvious the Frenchman didn't like the idea at all. I figured they'd tow him to Russell's Garage and look over the damage. Meanwhile, I drove Carey to my office and did a better patch job on the wound, but couldn't remove the bullet. I told April to report the gunshot wound to Sheriff Lens, and before long the sheriff hobbled down the street to my office.

I'd grown quite friendly with Sheriff Lens durin' my four years in Northmont, and just a few weeks earlier I'd had to treat him for a sprained ankle suffered when he slipped on a wet spot and fell durin' the ceremonies openin' the new jail. It had been an embarrassin' moment for the sheriff, and the embarrassment was goin' to last till he could walk without that slight limp to remind everyone of his accident.

But the new jail had opened on schedule, the best and biggest in the county, and Sheriff Lens was as proud as he would have been of a new daughter. "Fifteen cells," he'd bragged the day of the openin'. "That's more than the jail at the county seat. You need 'em these days with all the bootleggers around."

Now, as April showed him into my treatment room, he took one look at Eustace Carey and exclaimed, "My God, Eustace! Shot yourself in the leg! You sure the woodchuck didn't pot you from its hole?"

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"It ain't funny, Sheriff! I lost a lot o' blood out there—mighta bled to death!"

"You're too mean to bleed to death. Hell, the way you an' Jeff Whitehead been fightin' I'm surprised you'd even set foot on his property." The sheriff squinted. "You sure you weren't trespassin' and Jeff took a shot at you?"

"I shot myself," Carey insisted. "It was an accident."

I finished rewrappin' his bandages and remembered the gun I'd picked up. There was no point in keepin' it quiet. I'd brought it in from the car and now I handed it to Sheriff Lens. "Here's his gun. Don't look to me as if it's been fired."

The sheriff sniffed the barrel and then broke open the cylinder. "Oh, sure, Doc. Here's an empty cartridge. And you can still smell the powder."

"Let me see that." I couldn't believe my eyes. Where there had been six unfired bullets before, now there was a recently fired cartridge under the firin' pin. "I don't understand this. I could swear it hadn't been fired when I first examined it."

Sheriff Lens chuckled. "You leave the firearms to me, Doc. You just patch 'em up."

"I'm not crackin' up, Sheriff. I know what I saw." But we were interrupted by the arrival of Jeff Whitehead's older boy, Matt.

"Doc, Sheriff," he said, "I think you should come down to Russell's Garage. That fellow you ran into is causin' quite a rumpus Hank Russell says he can't fix the car before tomorrow an' the fellow wants another car. Says he's in a hurry. Mebbe he's a gangster or somethin'."

"Never heard of a French gangster," I commented, and Sheriff Lens perked up.

"You say he's French?"

I shrugged. "Seems so to me, but I wouldn't swear to it."

"Let's go see."

I left Eustace in April's care and we accompanied Matt back to Russell's Garage. The Frenchman was arguin' vigorously with Hank Russell when we entered, apparently tryin' to rent a car with which to continue his journey. But cars weren't all that plentiful in Northmont and big Hank Russell just kept shakin' his head.

"What seems to be the trouble here?" Sheriff Lens asked.

The little Frenchman turned and saw the badge pinned to the sheriff's chest. It seemed to throw him into a momentary pan-

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and he looked as if he was about to take off. Then, to my complete amazement, Sheriff Lens had his gun out, pullin' back on the hammer and aimin' it at the little guy in dead earnest.

"Guess you'd better stand right there," he said in a soft voice I hardly ever heard him use.

"What's all this, Sheriff?" Hank Russell asked. "Who is this fella?"

"Unless I'm very much mistaken, he's the notorious Georges Reme, otherwise known as The Eel, a confidence man wanted by the police of two continents. An' I've got him, right here in Northmont!"

It was a moment of triumph for Sheriff Lens, but it was to be short-lived.

As I learned later from the sheriff and from newspaper articles, Georges Reme was a con man who'd worked various swindles in Europe before comin' to America. But the exploits that had earned him the nickname of "The Eel" involved several daring escapes from police captivity. He boasted that no jail could hold him, and he seemed well on the way to provin' it.

The exploit that made the front page of *The New York Times* involved his most recent arrest in Paris. Transported to the Palais de Justice with a dozen other offenders, he managed to separate himself from the adult criminals and hover by a bench where a number of juvenile delinquents were waitin' to be questioned. When one of them was called, Reme took him by the arm and marched him out of the room, posin' as a detective. Once in the Juvenile Court he abandoned the youth and passed a police guard by claimin' he was a secret-service inspector.

The Eel had dropped from sight after that, only to reappear in Boston several weeks later. Posing as a French count with a collection of valuable paintings, he'd fleeced a leading museum out of a large amount of cash. And just a few days ago, according to Sheriff Lens, the Boston police had cornered him in an apartment house where he was staying. Though every exit was guarded, he escaped by posin' as a mailman, after he'd knocked out the real mailman and stolen the uniform.

"Sounds like something out of G. K. Chesterton," I commented.

"Who?"

"A writer. You wouldn't know him, Sheriff."

"Well, I know about The Eel, sure 'nuff! The Boston police say

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he stole a car from a salesman of carnival supplies an' high-tailed it outa town. They alerted every police department in New England."

Georges Reme merely looked at me and the sheriff an' said, "I will be gone from this town by morning."

"Darned right!" Sheriff Lens agreed. "I already called Boston an' they're sendin' two detectives to take you back tomorrow. I'll just have to put up with you overnight."

"No jail can hold The Eel," he boasted, soundin' very French.

"We'll see." The sheriff took a ring of keys from his pocket and motioned toward the stairs leading up from his office. "Come on."

I followed along, through a heavy barred door that Sheriff Lens unlocked and left open, and then down a passageway lined with empty cells. These cells occupied the entire second floor of the jail, with 11 of the 15 bein' along three outer walls. The buildin' was almost square and the jail corridor ran in an inner square, with the center portion containin' four holdin' cells for overnight drunks and the like. These inside cells, without windows to the outside world, were numbered 1 through 4, with the other numbers alternatin' left and right till they reached number 16 in the far outer corner.

Sheriff Lens unlocked the door and motioned Reme inside. "This'll be your home till mornin'. I'll bring your supper later."

The cell was about ten feet deep by six feet wide, with a single cot bolted to the wall. There was a toilet and sink and stool, but nothin' else. The glass was raised on a small barred window some six feet off the floor, lettin' in the warm May air. I knew it looked out on the back of Russell's Garage where the blacksmith shop used to be.

As Sheriff Lens pulled the cell door shut and the lock clicked into place, I asked, "How come number 16? You've only got 15 cells."

"Well, yeah, but I skipped 13 'cause it's unlucky."

"Seems to me any cell would be unlucky to a man in jail."

"Yeah, but 13 is unluckier than most. People are funny."

"There was a story by a man named Jacques Futrelle called *The Problem of Cell 13.*"

"Another of your author fellas! You do a peck o' reading, Doc."

"It was about a professor who escaped from a prison cell in a bafflin' manner."

"Huh! 'Nother good reason for not havin' a cell numbered 13!"

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I couldn't beat that logic, so I didn't try.

Back at the office my nurse April was all ears. "Tell me what happened, Dr. Sam. I hear tell Sheriff Lens captured a master criminal."

Somehow the idea of little Georges Reme bein' a master criminal brought a chuckle out of me. "Well, it wasn't all that excitin'," I said, but I went on to tell her the details of the automobile accident and the trouble they'd had towin' Reme's car into town with that dented fender. Russell was goin' ahead with the repairs, even though no one knew who'd be payin' the bill.

Later that day I sent Eustace Carey over to the hospital in Felix so they could remove the bullet. I was still puzzled about that revolver, though I thought I had an idea. I was thinkin' it through later that night in my apartment when the telephone rang just after midnight. I thought about Mrs. Hitchins pregnant out at her farm, and about old man Aarons hovering near death. Whoever it was, a phone call that late usually meant a trip out.

But it was Sheriff Lens, more excited than I'd ever heard him before. "Doc, can you come over to the jail right away? I just went back to check the cells an' The Eel is gone!"

"You mean escaped?"

"I don't know what I mean, Doc—he's just gone!"

"I'll be right over," I told him.

When I arrived he had every light in the jail on, and had summoned his two deputies to help in the search. But it was a hopeless task from the beginnin'. There was only one other prisoner in the jail that night—Rudy Henkle, Carey's friend. After Carey had gone off to the hospital Rudy had started drinkin' heavily. He'd broken a window at Dixie's, where they served bootleg whiskey in coffee cups, and generally made a nuisance of himself till Sheriff Lens was forced to arrest him.

Rudy had been given Cell 1, at the opposite end of the building from Cell 16, and he'd slept through the whole thing anyway. Now, sobering up, he called through the bars, "What's goin' on? How's a man to sleep with all the lights on in the middle of the night?"

"Calm down, Rudy," I said. "I'll be in to talk with you later." Then I followed Sheriff Lens along the corridor between the cells to the one where I'd last seen Georges Reme. Cell 16 was empty now like the others, without any evidence that it had ever been

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occupied, except for a wrinkled blanket on the floor.

"There it is, Doc. He's just vanished!"

"All right," I said. "Now tell me everything that happened since I left you this afternoon."

"Well, not much of anything happened, to tell the truth. I had some food sent in for the prisoner at suppertime and I took it up to him myself 'cause all my deputies had gone home. I tried talkin' with him, but all I got was more of the same—about how he'd be gone by mornin'."

"Exactly how did you bring him the tray? Get one and show me just what you did."

Sheriff Lens grumbled but he went back downstairs for the metal tray on which he brought the food. "I set it on the floor here an' unlocked the cell door. Then I picked it up again and went in."

"Did you lock the cell again once you were inside?"

"No, I left it standin' open. He wasn't goin' anywhere. I had my hand on my gun the whole time, an' besides, the barred door at the top of the stairs was locked."

"He could have overpowered you and taken your keys."

"That little squirt?"

"He could have thrown food in your face and been on top of you before you knew it."

"He'd of ended up dead for his trouble, I'll tell you that!"

"All right," I said. There was no use speculatin' on it, since The Eel hadn't escaped that way anyhow. "Then what did you do?"

"Sat there an' watched him eat. Oh, he was a slippery one, all right! No doubt about that! Once when he edged too near the cell door I had to draw my pistol. But he settled back down and finished his food."

"And then?"

"Hell, then I picked up the tray with both hands, swung the cell door shut behind me, and left. These cell doors lock automatically when they're closed, with a latch bolt, but they need a key to reopen 'em. The door at the top o' the stairs has a dead bolt, and I had to unlock it and then lock it again."

"All right. Then what happened?"

"Nothin' much. I already told you about arrestin' Rudy Henkle."

"Tell me again. Tell me about bringin' him to his cell."

"Well, that's just what I did. I had to half carry him up the

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stairs an' dump him on the cot. I s'pose that's why I put him in the first cell inside the door, so I wouldn't have to lug him too far."

"And The Eel was in Cell 16 at that time?"

"Sure! I didn't turn the lights on down that end because it was after ten an' I figured he was sleepin'. But after I had Rudy stowed away an' locked up tight I took a stroll down there. I could see him huddled under his blanket."

"But he didn't move or speak?"

"No. I told you he was asleep. Anyway, I went back an' snapped off the light an' locked the door at the top o' the stairs. And then I stayed in my office the rest of the evenin'."

"Is there any other way out of the cell block except through your office?"

"No, sir! Fire Department wanted a back stairs for emergencies, but I told 'em the building is fireproof—it's all brick outside. Besides, a back stairs would have to be locked all the time, so it wouldn't much help in a fire."

I walked to the window and reached up to tug at the bars. They were all firmly in place, and even a man as small as Georges Reme couldn't have wiggled between them. I stooped to pick up the blanket from the floor. "You say he was sleepin' under this?"

"That's right."

An idea struck me. "When you went back to check on him, did you try the cell door to make sure it was locked?"

"'Course I did! It was locked, all right, and he was inside."

"All right. When did you go up again?"

"Henkle started raisin' a fuss about a half hour ago. I could hear him 'cause he was right at the top of the stairs. I went up and he said he'd been havin' a nightmare. This time when I checked The Eel's cell it was empty."

"Let's look outside," I said.

The second-floor cell overlooked the lot behind Russell's Garage, but this late at night there was no one around. I found a lantern sittin' on a barrel and lit it, throwin' an eerie glow on the hard earth.

"One thing, Sheriff," I said. "Was the cell door still locked when you noticed that Cell 16 was empty?"

"Sure was!"

"Any chance Reme was hiding under the bunk?"

"Impossible. I turned on all the lights right away, and I made

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sure the cell was empty before I unlocked the door. That blanket was on the floor and he was gone."

I bent and picked up something from the ground directly under Reme's cell. "What is it?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"A long piece of string."

"String?"

"It's as if The Eel made himself small enough to fit between those bars and then lowered himself to the ground on this piece of string."

"That's crazy!"

"You got any better idea?"

"No," Sheriff Lens admitted.

"Did he have any string in his pockets when you arrested him?"

"He might have," the sheriff said. "I frisked him for weapons, but I didn't make him empty his pockets. I figured he was only bein' held overnight."

"Then he might even have had some picklocks."

"No, no—anything metal like that I'd have felt when I searched him. Besides, these new jail locks are supposed to be pickproof."

I rolled up the string and slipped it into my pocket. "Then what are we left with? The Eel was in Cell 16 at ten o'clock with two locked doors between him and freedom. Two hours later he was gone, with the doors still locked and the window undisturbed. No one else was even on the same floor with him except Rudy Henkle, and he was asleep in his own locked cell."

"That story you mentioned, Doc, about Cell Number 13—how did the guy escape in that one?"

"It was a complicated method, but basically he managed to get a message to a friend on the outside who helped him."

"Think The Eel had friends on the outside?"

"I don't know what to think right now," I admitted. "Ask me in the mornin'."

"By mornin' The Eel will be halfway to Chicago!"

"I don't think so," I said, studying the back end of Russell's Garage.

April came bustlin' into the office a little after eight the next mornin'. "My, aren't we early this morning!"

"I didn't get much sleep," I told her.

"Did you hear the news about The Eel escapin'? Sheriff Lens will be laughed outa town."

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"It'll be too bad if he is. I like the sheriff. He's a good man."

"His spankin'-new, escape-proof jail with fifteen cells! The first real prisoner he gets walks away like the jail was made of paper."

"Do I have any patients this mornin', April?"

"Mrs. Bassett's stoppin' by to get a new prescription, that's all."

"I'll write it out and you can give it to her. I'm goin' out."

"Down to the jail?"

"No. To Russell's Garage."

Though the hour was early, Hank Russell was already smeared with axle grease and crankcase oil. His father before him had been a blacksmith, and when he died Hank had seen the handwritin' on the wall and turned the shop into a garage. He was a good mechanic for a town like Northmont, and it made us feel we were keepin' up with the automotive age.

"Hello, Dr. Sam. How's your patient doing?" he asked me as I entered the garage.

"Which one?"

"Eustace Carey, o' course!"

Carey's wound had completely left my mind. "Oh, I'm sure he's comin' along. They'll probably let him out of the hospital today."

"That's good. Foolish accident."

If it was an accident, I thought. Aloud I asked, "How soon will you have that car repaired?"

"Just finishin' it up. Guess The Eel won't be needin' it now, though. He's probably far away from here."

I walked over and looked at the car. Russell had hammered out the dented fender and the wheel turned freely now. "Anybody else been around?" I asked. "Whitehead's son, maybe?"

"Haven't seen him since yesterday."

I walked over to the jail and found Sheriff Lens on the telephone to the Boston police, tryin' to explain what had happened to his prisoner. When he'd finished, sputterin' and embarrassed, I asked, "Have you released Rudy Henkle yet?"

"Hell, no, Doc. If I have my way he'll stay there till he rots."

"The judge might have somethin' to say about that."

"I been thinkin' about it all night, and I figured out how The Eel escaped. It's the only way he coulda got out! It was like that Cell 13 story you told me about. He took the string from his pocket an' lowered a note out his cell window. Hank Russell saw it from his garage an' come over to read it. The Eel promised money in return for help. So Hank got Rudy Henkle, who was

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still hangin' around, to help. Rudy pretended to be drunk an' smashed that window so I'd have to arrest him. Once in his cell he managed to get a picklock to The Eel, an' that Frenchman used it. I know our locks are supposed to be pickproof, but who in hell knows what Frenchmen can do?"

"How did Rudy get the picklock to The Eel?" I asked.

"Well, I suppose he slid it along the floor," Sheriff Lens answered, a bit uncertainly.

"But The Eel's cell was in the opposite corner of the building. It was down the corridor and a sharp left turn from Henkle's. There's no way Henkle could have reached it or even seen it from his cell."

"Yeah," the sheriff muttered. "I suppose you're right. But I still think Henkle's involved."

"Suppose you let me talk to him, Sheriff. I might learn something."

He took me up and opened the cell door. Rudy Henkle was seated on the cot, holding his head in his hands. "Hello, Rudy," I said. Behind me, Sheriff Lens had relocked the door.

"When are they goin' to let me outa here, Doc? I don't know nothin' about The Eel's escape."

"But you got drunk and broke a window, Rudy."

"Well, sure . . ."

"Why?"

"What do you mean, Doc?"

"Why'd you get drunk? It's not like you."

He looked away. "I don't know."

"Want me to tell you, Rudy? Want me to tell you what happened out at Whitehead's farm yesterday?" Sheriff Lens had walked around the corner to look into Cell 16 again, but I dropped my voice anyway so he wouldn't hear.

"How do you know?"

"I know. When I looked at that Colt revolver it hadn't been fired. But when Sheriff Lens examined it later, after the car accident, it smelled of gunpowder an' there was an empty cartridge in it. Now I know I wasn't blind, so that only left one explanation—there were *two* Colt revolvers out at Whitehead's farm yesterday, and you guys switched 'em on me while the car was parked right after the accident."

"I don't know what you're—"

"And what do *two* long-barreled revolvers suggest?"

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"What?"

"A duel."

His shoulders slumped, but he said nothin'.

"Those crazy fools fought a duel out there yesterday, didn't they? Whitehead and Eustace Carey, settlin' their old grievances with pistols! Jeff Whitehead's son was his second and you were Carey's second. Only Carey never even got a shot off, did he? Jeff Whitehead plinked him in the leg and then you all suddenly decided you needed a doctor."

"We were damn' fools," Rudy admitted, lifting his head to look at me. "It's a wonder one o' them wasn't killed. When I had sense enough to think it through last night I went out and got good and drunk! But even that didn't help—I passed out here in the cell and dreamed about it all over again. I even heard the shot."

"Shot?"

"It woke me up durin' the night. It was as if a real shot had been fired. But I know I musta been dreamin' about the duel."

I patted his knee. "Don't worry, Rudy. I'll speak to the sheriff about gettin' you out of here."

Sheriff Lens returned and unlocked the cell door for me. I led the way through the second door and waited while he locked it behind us. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"It's just an idea—but I think I know how The Eel did it. I'm goin' to come back here tonight and show you what happened."

The rest of the day dragged on interminably. All the talk in town was about the escape, and even the State Troopers came by to question Sheriff Lens. There was talk of usin' bloodhounds to pick up The Eel's trail, figurin' he'd lit out across country, but as near as I could tell nothin' much was accomplished.

I went back to the jail at dusk and led Sheriff Lens down the street to Russell's Garage. "What we comin' down here for?" he asked. "We should be out chasin' The Eel!"

"I don't think The Eel ever left Northmont, Sheriff, and I'll try to prove it."

"Never left—"

"Keep your voice low," I warned as we moved through the gatherin' darkness at the side of the garage. On our right I could see the jail, and the barred window of The Eel's cell.

"I still say Henkle was in on it," Lens grumbled softly. "An' now I had to let him go."

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"Henkle wasn't involved."

"Then how was it possible? There's no other answer!"

"There are at least two other answers, Sheriff."

"What?"

"You see, the whole impossibility is based solely on your testimony. If your story collapses, the impossible escape collapses."

"But—"

"Rudy Henkle was awakened by what sounded like a shot. He thought it was part of a dream he was havin', but what if it wasn't? What if you went back to serve Reme his food and he tried to jump you? You pulled your gun and shot him, Sheriff. Then, terrified at what you'd done, you carried the body out and buried it back here in these weeds. And made up the whole story of The Eel's impossible escape."

Sheriff Lens was staring at me in the near darkness, and I could see that his hand had dropped to the gun he carried. "You believe that, Doc?"

"No, I don't. If that was what happened, you'd have told the truth. Shootin' a prisoner who's tryin' to escape is a lot less damagin' to your reputation than lettin' one escape! Besides, I told you there were two possible answers."

It was then that we heard the noise—somewhere nearby, not 50 feet away—a gentle movement that might have passed unnoticed. Someone was at the side door of Russell's Garage, workin' on the lock.

I sprang forward. "Come on, Sheriff, it's him!"

Georges Reme turned and tried to run, but we were on him in an instant. I held him down while Sheriff Lens got the handcuffs on him. "This time we'll take better care of you," I promised.

He was cursin' in French when we took him inside, and I settled down in the sheriff's office to explain the correct answer to the problem of Cell 16.

While Georges Reme smoked a cigarette with his cuffed hands, I said, "It was a complex escape method worthy of Futrelle's *Cell 13*. The Eel didn't rely on outside help but simply worked from minute to minute, taking advantage of existing conditions. It's a way of life for him, I imagine, and other criminals could duplicate it if they had skill and daring."

Sheriff Lens was growing impatient. "How'd he get out of that locked cell?"

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"Well, I suppose he had to start with the cell door. You showed me it had a latch bolt that snapped shut when the door closed. But you left the cell door open while he ate, and you even told me you had to draw your gun once when he got too close to it. In that instant, when he was at the open door, Reme managed to jam something—maybe a piece of bread or even a toothpick—into the bolt hole, preventing the bolt from latching completely when the cell door was closed. You were carryin' the food tray with two hands, Sheriff, and you didn't have a free hand to try the door and make sure it was locked properly."

"But I tried it later," Sheriff Lens insisted.

"I'll get to later. My point is that yesterday evening just after suppertime Georges Reme was free of his cell. Only the barred door at the top of the stairs stood between him and freedom."

"But I was down here in the office. Even if he managed to get that door open somehow, he couldn't of got by me!"

"He didn't manage to open the door, Sheriff—you opened it for him."

"I—"

"When you brought in Rudy Henkle. Remember, Henkle was in Cell Number 1, nearest the stairs. It's one of that center block of four cells, and it's at the opposite end of the floor from Cell 16. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, you couldn't even see Cell 16 from Cell 1. I can assume you left the door at the top of the stairs open, because you would have had your hands full with Rudy and because I've seen you leave that door open two times now when I was with you. You have to turn the key to lock it and you just didn't bother. But for Reme here, hiding in the darkness around the corner of those center cells, it was the chance he was waitin' for. While your back was turned gettin' Rudy onto the bunk, he slipped past and went down the stairs to freedom."

"But I saw him after that in his locked cell!" the sheriff protested.

"You saw somethin' bulky under a blanket, and with the lights at that end of the floor off you just assumed it was Reme. But The Eel was clever. He couldn't know you'd be comin' up with a prisoner at ten o'clock. In fact, for all he knew he'd be alone up there till you checked him in the mornin' and brought his breakfast. So he thought up an idea to give himself a few precious seconds of time. If you came up in the mornin' and saw the cell empty, you'd raise the alarm instantly, probably even run back to the

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stairs before The Eel could escape down them. He needed you at the cell for thirty seconds to a minute while he sneaked around that center cellblock, through the open door and down the stairs."

"So *you* knew I left it open. But how did *he* know?"

The Eel merely smiled, so I answered the question. "He saw you leave it open when you took him up to the cell yesterday, Sheriff."

"Oh."

"Anyway, before he left his cell after dinner he prepared a dummy under the blanket and then locked it in the cell by simply removin' the obstruction he'd put into the bolt hole and lettin' the bolt snap shut."

"What dummy? You've told me how The Eel could escape from a locked cell—now tell me how the dummy could escape!"

"Sheriff, the stolen car Georges Reme was drivin' belonged to a salesman for carnival supplies. Of all the samples he might have had in that car, what would be the most likely?"

Sheriff Lens looked blank, but Georges Reme smiled. "I compliment you, Doctor," he said. "I never expected such perception in a town like this."

"Balloons," I said simply. "You had a couple of balloons in your pocket, along with the string for them. You inflated them, placed them under the blanket, and dropped the string out the window. Once you were outside the jail, you tugged at the string, pullin' the balloons through the bars. At least one of them burst, makin' a noise that sounded like a gunshot to the half-sleepin' Rudy Henkle."

"Why'd he bother to pull the balloons out?" Sheriff Lens asked. "Why not leave them there?"

I shrugged. "I suppose he considered it a good trick he might want to use again. And with the balloons gone his escape was all the more bafflin'. That's why he took the balloons with him though he dropped a piece of the string."

"I never saw the string runnin' out that window."

"It was dark, and you hadn't turned on that light, remember? You had only the light by Henkle's cell."

Sheriff Lens shook his head. "A lotta things coulda gone wrong with it."

"I told you The Eel worked from minute to minute. All his escapes have depended on luck and darin'. That's why I figured he wouldn't set out on foot across country. He'd already established there were no other cars available here, and if he stole one he

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might be unfamiliar with its operation. A car like mine is a bit tricky, for instance. So I took a chance that he was hidin' somewhere nearby, waitin' for Russell to fix his car so he could steal it a second time."

"I'll be damned," Sheriff Lens said.

Then I turned to The Eel. "Tell me, Georges, where were you hidin' for almost twenty-four hours?"

At first I didn't think he'd answer, but then he did. Maybe he was proud of havin' fooled me that much. "I was inside the barrel beside Russell's Garage," he said with a smile. "The one from which you lifted the lantern."

"Well," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded, "that's how I solved the mystery an' made the front pages of the New York papers. But it was all for nothin', of course. Six months later The Eel escaped from a Boston jail and made his way back to France. He was always a slippery fellow. What about Whitehead an' Carey and their duel, you ask? That part of the story was far from over. It led to an impossible crime involvin' an old country inn. But the hour is late, and that'll have to wait till next time. A small—ah—libation for the road?"

"Q"

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